The WORLD and WINSTOW

by EDITH HENRIETTA FOWLER

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THE WORLD *and* WINSTOW

By

EDITH HENRIETTA FOWLER

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Contents

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	AS CHILDREN	1
II.	PRIZE DAYS	20
III.	THRESHOLDS	37
IV.	MERTON WAINWRIGHT . . .	71
V.	RENNEL HILL	111
VI.	TOWN LIFE	149
VII.	AN AMATEUR CONCERT . . .	190
VIII.	JACK KENYON	234
IX.	GEORGINA'S MARRIAGE . . .	254
X.	DRIFTING APART	278
XI.	THE WHITE BALL	317
XII.	INTO THE VALLEY	352
XIII.	KERRIESORT LODGE . . .	384
XIV.	"THE MEASURE YE METE" . .	423

The World and Winstow

CHAPTER I

AS CHILDREN

"It is too difficult, it really is!" and despair rang in the childish voice as she threw down her dictionary and grammar.

"Do not make such a noise, Ursula; it disturbs me," replied her father reprovingly.

"Oh, I wish I was clever," sighed the child, "so that things might be easier. I don't believe any of the girls take as long over their lessons as I do. And yet they learn them quite as well, though I don't believe they want to half as much."

She rested her tired little face on one of her hands, and her eyes wandered to the picture of the garden as it glowed with sunset colour through the open window. How fresh and bright it seemed out there, and how Ursula longed to be drinking in the sweet air that the evening wind was bringing down from the

moors! School hours almost filled the day, and left little vigour for out-of-door life, and yet the child was always longing for it. She was so weak and delicate, and the world was such a busy place for the motherless little girl, who had the responsibility of the house, as well as of the head of it, on her tiny shoulders. And so play-time was almost forgotten by the time that Ursula was eleven. An eager spirit dwelt in the frail body, and a burning ambition to succeed in all the departments of life to which she was called. To please her father, and have things nice at home; to do her lessons well, and rise in her class at school; above all, to win the grudging approbation of a certain schoolboy friend,—these were Ursula's great ideals, and for these she struggled to spend more strength than in fact she possessed.

The dreamy look faded from her eyes, and she came back to her books with a start.

"I must do it," she said to herself, and her little mouth tightened with firmness, "or else Beatrice Holt will get above me to-morrow, and I shall lose marks for the prize." And the small close-cropped head was bent once more determinedly over the dictionary, by the help of which Ursula was trying to construe the piece

of Cæsar that was designed for the morrow's lesson.

Ursula Grey and her father lived in a small house on the outskirts of a quaint old country town, which nestled by the side of a river, just where its course is nearly run, and the Channel rushes up to welcome it home to the sea. The hurried murmur of its waters can be heard up on the moors, down from which the woodlands slope, till the hush of the swelling tide proclaims a silence far away up inland amid the stillness of unbroken meadow country. Big hills clasp hands to keep the town well-nigh encircled by their protecting presence, and forests of trees and tangled undergrowth clothe their steep sides. In spring the freshness of the young larches paints the whole countryside with the feathery beauty of their living green, and in the autumn the rich russet of the landscape claims the greater beauty of colour for its own. A very old-world town was Winstow, with winding streets and small dark shops opening into sunny gardens at their rear. It could not boast of any improvements—no enterprising Corporation, no tramways, or water works, or electric light. Its pride rather lay in the things of its past—in the ruined castle, that held old stories of the feasting of

nobles and the visits of kings; in the splendid Abbey, a few miles up the river, which through many centuries has stood as a witness of the devoted skill of long-forgotten workers, and in spite of crumbling walls and broken roof and grass-grown pavements yet by its wondrous dignity and beauty proclaims itself to be the Temple of the Lord. There was no art gallery in Winstow, but from every street corner could be seen a view so fair and far-reaching that the most careless passer-by would pause and look, and thereby learn perhaps more than a painted picture could possibly teach. The Grammar School, dating from very early times, stood at the summit of the main street, and within its old grey walls the sons of many former generations had learned their classics and their manhood without the interruption of any modern side. At the foot of the same street a grey house frowned on the outside world, and cast a stern glance from its uncurtained windows on the follies and faults of the "young ladies" for whom it announced itself to be the "Seminary." And here it was that Ursula Grey, together with all the other girls of the town, went to school.

Mr. Grey's profession was the law, and his recreation an invalid's rôle. His pastime had been

the study of medical books, from which he demonstrated that he was already the victim of several mortal diseases, but as they failed to prove his mortality he became more and more aggrieved, blaming mankind in general, and providence in particular, for the inefficiency of the said diseases to perform the task he had allotted to them. Ursula was his only child, and he hoped to train her to become his nurse. Always far from strong herself, she was quick to sympathise with the suffering her father continually talked of, and anxious to bring the difficult gleams of enjoyment into his life. She had a faint memory of times when her mother was with them, and her father used to laugh and even play, and then there came a blurred recollection of a day when people all cried, though she was made quite happy with as many apples to eat as she wanted, a piece of good fortune which had never happened to her before. And after that her mother did not come back, and she went to Miss Paterson's day school, and life began in earnest.

"I am going out for a little walk," said her father suddenly; "I think it will do me good."

"I wish I could come too," replied the child wistfully.

"What! And neglect your lessons! I am surprised at you, Ursula! And besides, are you not working for a prize?"

"Oh, yes, father! I want that prize more than anything else in the world. I do hope I shall get it."

"Perseverance is everything, my dear," answered Mr. Grey. "Good-night, in case you are in bed by the time of my return. I feel more able to take a walk now than earlier in the day when the sun was so hot."

It was a very pale and pinched little face that Ursula lifted to be kissed, but her big grey eyes glowed with enthusiasm at the thought of the possible prize, and her lips smiled slightly.

"Good-night, daddy! Take care of yourself."

He had not been gone for more than a quarter of an hour before a noisy step was heard in the hall.

"Where are you, Ursula?" called a cheerful voice. "I saw your father on the way."

"Oh, Merton!" cried the little girl delightedly, "is it really you? I am so glad you have come."

"What are you doing?" continued the boy, glancing towards the books. "You don't mean to say your lessons aren't done yet? It is nearly eight o'clock!"

"I know. But, Merton, this is so difficult. I can't make it out."

"Well, you are a silly!" he replied candidly. "And an easy little paragraph like that! Look here, Ursula: this is your nominative, and there is the verb, and that is an accusative and infinitive, you know. For goodness' sake don't begin bothering looking out words. I know them all. Don't you see the sense now?"

"Oh, Merton!" she exclaimed in awe-struck ecstasy, "how frightfully clever you are! Of course I see it now. I wonder what made me so stupid?"

"Well, come out, and risk the parsing. I should think you knew all the principal parts of these verbs." And the boy picked up his motar-board, which he had thrown on the table.

"How lovely it is out of doors!" exclaimed the little girl, lifting her hot face to the fanning breeze. "I have been so busy all day."

"We played cricket this afternoon. I made thirty. It is jolly to do things well, isn't it? I mean to be in the first eleven next year. Mr. Carpenter stopped to-day and said how well I played." And the boy's handsome dark face flushed with pleasure at the remembrance.

"You are so clever at everything, Merton," re-

plied his friend admiringly. "I do think it is splendid for you. I wish I was too."

"Oh, girls don't matter," he remarked loftily, "and you are pretty high in the school for your age, you know."

"If only I could get the Latin prize I should get into the first class. I am trying so frightfully hard for it."

"Then you'll get it sure enough. I say, I will come to the prize-giving if you do, and give you a fine old cheer."

"Will you really, Merton? How good of you! I am looking forward awfully to the prize-giving at the Grammar School. It is my favourite thing in all the year."

"Why?" asked Merton, with some surprise.

"I don't know," and Ursula looked thoughtful; "only it makes me so excited and wanting to cry with gladness when the boys clap, and especially when you come up for your prizes, Merton."

"Bosh!" interrupted her companion. "But I shall have a lot of prizes this time, I expect. None of the other fellows can beat me when I really try." And he threw his head up proudly.

Merton Wainwright was a wonderfully clever boy. His father, the successful draper of Win-

stow, hoped that his only son would one day enter into the old-established business, and find a comfortable fortune there; but the masters at the Grammar School knew otherwise. They saw the growing power of the boy's brain, and felt sure that Merton would never be content with the quiet country life which had satisfied his fathers for several generations before him. They saw that the one school scholarship was easily within his reach, and that with it he would go to Oxford and outgrow the paternal traditions—and they were all proud of the young scholar who would bring honour to the school, and thereby repay the long hours of teaching which the average boys of Winstow turned to such poor account. Mr. Wainwright had not much sympathy with the classics, but he had enormous admiration for success, and so there was rejoicing in the big comfortable house behind the shop when Merton brought home richly-bound prizes with which his mother was accustomed to adorn the round, bare, polished table in the centre of the unlived-in drawing-room. Ursula and Merton had always been friends. Possibly the reason was in those early days, just as it is in so many later ones, that she was so utterly different from his sisters. For the Wainwright girls, one a

great deal older than himself, and one a year younger, were both robust and commonplace, with few aspirations beyond the trimming of their hats, or what, in their different ways, they designated as a "bit of fun." They had not any respect for their brother's brilliant talents, but they had much for their father's gold-lined till; and they regarded poor little Ursula Grey with that patronising pity which, even as a child, she shrank from, though she could not understand why.

To Ursula, Merton and his successes were the absorbing interest of her life. She possessed an enormous power of hero-worship, and to win a word of praise from him made her blissfully happy for a week. That he should consider her good to look at she was too young to have imagined, but that he should think her clever was her untiring hope. So she toiled over the difficult lessons, and in a measure succeeded, never knowing that more power lurked in the large, sad, grey eyes, and the pathetic lines of her wistful face, than in all the Latin she would be able to compress into her aching head. And in those days Merton did not know this either.

On the following day the girls of Miss Paterson's school were awaiting their Latin lesson. It

was given by one of the Grammar School masters, who lived with his sister on the way up from Winstow to the Chase. A quiet, rather dull personage in the opinion of the Winstow world, but the boys called him "a good sort," and it is just possible that their opinion was the more worth having of the two.

"Young ladies, young ladies! no tittering, if you please!" rang out Miss Paterson's orthodox schoolmistress voice, as some one had evidently knocked down an umbrella in the hall. And then David Carpenter walked in, more shy and embarrassed by the small feminine class, than he would have been by the whole two hundred Grammar School boys. Perhaps there is no point in the whole of life where humour sinks to so low a level as at a girls' school; a broken pencil or the dropping of a book being enough to reduce a class to inextinguishable mirth; while a girl who walked with a mincing gait and pursed up her lips with assumed propriety proved herself the admired wit and humourist of the whole community.

"Ursula Grey, top marks!" said the master at the close of the lesson. "You construed very well indeed," he added kindly, as the child's face flushed with excited pleasure.

"I don't care, I believe you were helped," said one of the girls crossly as they started on their homeward way. The gladness on Ursula's face faded. She had never thought about that when Mr. Carpenter was speaking, but it robbed her little triumph of all its joy. And she had worked so hard over that lesson, even apart from Merton's help.

"It is downright wicked," continued Beatrice Holt, who was Ursula's rival for the prize, "and acting a lie and being mean and horrid. I'd be ashamed to get marks by stolen work," she added in righteous indignation as she slammed the gate which guarded the Holts' front drive.

Big tears filled Ursula's eyes, and her small soul was full of sorrow. She spent a most unhappy evening, and with the night came a darker, deeper sense of sin.

"I am really wicked," she murmured under her breath just to give the feeling form, and the big brown wardrobe seemed to frown at the iniquity of little girls. All the familiar objects of the room looked unfamiliar and unfriendly in the strange dim light that crept from the moon through the closed blinds; and Ursula lay with burning cheeks and trembling hands alone with her remorse all through one of the long hours

that lie between the summer sunset and the early dawn. Weird noises of a whispering breeze outside or a creaking clothes-basket within, filled her with terror, and kept reminding her how wicked she was.

Wickedness had always seemed such a dreadful, far-off thing to Ursula, linking in a way the big oak pulpit of the church with a God who dwelt somewhere above it, and was terribly strict even with grown-up people. But she herself had always hoped to escape. And now, in the loneliness of the night, she felt a fresh thrill of terror in remembering that God never went to sleep; and her poor little hands were stretched out in pleading misery for protection. And protection came, though the child knew not that it was from the God she dreaded. The soothing touch of sleep closed her tired eyes, and hushed her into a dreamless rest; and when she awoke the sun was shining and the birds were singing, and a comforting thought crept in to heal the wound. She would go herself and tell Mr. Carpenter all about it, and he would be able to wipe all the wickedness away. She felt sure he would, for did not he wear a cap and gown in school, and that showed how clever and powerful he was?

Miss Georgina Carpenter was a very important

member of Winstow society. A tall, handsome, hard-faced woman of over forty, who had it on her conscience to improve the world in general and her brother David in particular, for whom she kept house, and who was her junior by several years. Among the duties of women she held to be the proper preparing of the household meals, but the idea that pleasant companionship and sympathetic interest might be as important to the tired and hungry man at the head of the house as well-cooked vegetables and a variety of puddings, never once entered her head. She prided herself on her candour and brusqueness, and David grew daily more silent and reserved.

It was rather a long, uphill walk to Thornwood Cottage, where the Carpenters lived, but directly afternoon school was over Ursula started in great haste. She was so anxious to get the cloud cleared away—and living so much in a grown-up world with her father prevented her from being as shy as small schoolgirls generally are.

"Please is Mr. Carpenter at home?" she asked the servant, and immediately Georgina came out into the hall.

"What do you want? Let me see what child

it is? Oh! Ursula Grey. What do you want up here? A message from your father, perhaps?"

"I want to see Mr. Carpenter, please," Ursula explained during the first pause.

"Mr. Carpenter is busy," replied his sister, who always took upon herself to answer for David, quite irrespective of his wishes. "Tell me your business, instead."

"But I must see him," pleaded the child; "it is only a very short thing I have to say."

"Say it to me," persisted Georgina. "I cannot allow him to be disturbed just as he has come in from school."

Ursula's mouth tightened. She was not the only person who felt inclined to fight with Georgina, though she was one of the smallest.

"Please ask him if he is too busy to see me," she continued.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Georgina, "how many more times must I speak?"

But her sentence was cut short by the opening of the study door, and the appearance of David in the hall.

"Oh, Mr. Carpenter!" cried Ursula, "please let me come into your room and speak to you. It is so very important."

"What is the matter?" asked David, perceiving his sister's ruffled countenance.

"I was only trying to save you trouble," said Georgina sharply, "and as usual I get no thanks for it. That is always the way with men," and she bounced back into the sitting-room.

"Can I do anything for you?" began David, leading the child into his study.

Ursula looked up at him fearlessly.

"Oh, please, Mr. Carpenter, it was Merton helping me that made my Cæsar so good, and the girls said it was wicked to get top marks for it—only I never thought. Will you please take the wickedness away?" and she laid a small pleading hand on his coat sleeve.

David Carpenter looked down at her in wonder. He had no experience of the tender consciences of little girls, and he felt clumsy and afraid of breaking something which was too frail for him to handle.

"It—it is all right," he said lamely, though wishing he knew better how to talk to her.

"And I did not mean to be wicked," she continued, with a confiding little gesture, "only I was so tired and it was too difficult till Merton came in and showed me how to do it. I am so sorry."

"Don't be that." And David looked distressed. "It was not really wicked at all."

"Not wicked," exclaimed Ursula, and a glad light spread over her wistful face. "And are you sure that God isn't angry with me?"

David was more and more embarrassed. He did not know how to answer such questions, being far too reserved ever to mention even the name of God in ordinary conversation, or indeed any of the things he held most dear.

"I thought He was in the night," continued the child, "and it frightened me so."

"No, no," replied David gravely, "you—you must never think that, because—because it would not be true." And his face flushed with the effort of speaking of such things.

"I didn't know God was as kind as you," said Ursula softly. "You see, you've taken all the wickedness away, and I am quite happy again."

The man stood silent, with a new feeling creeping into his heart—the feeling of chivalry and power of protection and tenderness such as lurks in most manly souls if only those who need it will claim such help. But it had never struck David before that any one could really want his. His sister, by her aggressive independence and scorn of weakness, was hardening his reserve

into an iron wall concerning his fellows, and he had never known any other woman intimately enough to learn his mistake. He looked down on the child beside him with a kind light in his eyes, and he felt that it was good to be able to wipe away even one of the smallest of earth's sorrows. He never knew before that he could.

Just then the door opened and Georgina bustled in.

"What is all this about? It is time you went home, Ursula, or you will be late for your father's tea."

"Give her a drink of milk first," suggested David.

Georgina looked indignant.

"Surely, David, I can manage my department in this house without your interference. Drinking milk between meals is an extremely bad habit, and spoils a child's appetite. But I should have offered Ursula a glass of barley water without your suggestion."

Her brother turned away with a sigh; the jar grated and tired him strangely.

"Good-night," he said, as Ursula held out her hand. "And you did the rest of your lessons, very well apart from the construing."

"I cannot have you bothered about school

work when you are at home," chimed in Georgina again; "I want you to rest then. But I get no thanks for my consideration," she added in an injured voice.

But the whole atmosphere was changed for Ursula. She ran down the hill as if on air, and was so bright at tea that her father expressed astonishment. It was so long since Ursula had found any one to take up a burden for her, longer than she could remember. She had carried so many all by herself, for even her happiness in Merton's friendship meant much wear and tear to keep up with his interests and exploits. So it was a new and restful sensation to the tired spirit to find somebody who could and would help her.

After she had said her conventional, stiff little prayers that night, the child knelt on for a few moments in silence, and then she whispered softly, "And please God, thank you for being as kind as Mr. Carpenter," which was her first real prayer, and so the first faint flicker of a higher Light.

CHAPTER II

PRIZE DAYS

THE last week in July brought some great events to Winstow. Speech day at the Grammar School was the most important; and there was also a prize-giving at Miss Paterson's, and an evening party afterwards, at which the pupils provided miscellaneous entertainment. To Ursula it was a week of thrilling excitement as well as sickening anxiety. She gloried in the prizes Merton was sure to win, and she made herself quite ill with nervousness over her efforts to succeed also.

"Can I help you, David?" asked Georgina Carpenter, going into the study where her brother sat at a table piled with examination papers. "Let me look over the girls' answers. You have surely enough to do with the Grammar School work?"

"No, thank you," he answered absently; "I must do them all myself because I have to award the prizes."

"That is nonsense, David. As if I did not know how to do that quite as well as you—in

fact, much better, seeing that I have more knowledge of girls' work. And you might surely know that without my telling you. I should have been a splendid governess myself, only I had so much more important work to do; and besides, you needed some one to keep house for you. If I were not here, it is my opinion you would never sit properly through a single meal, and fall into no end of bad habits."

David looked up resignedly. His elder sister's vigour and management crushed him into acquiescence.

"You are quite right, Georgina; but I have nearly finished now. There are only these Latin papers from Miss Paterson's."

Georgina took them out of his hands.

"I know as much Latin as you do. Indeed, if only I had been a man, and not fettered by the ridiculous limits of sex, which, thank heaven, are being yearly swept away, I should have taken a far better degree than you did; and not been content to settle down at such a school as Winstow, teaching little girls and such-like on my half-holidays. But you never had any go in you, David. I remember what a disappointment it was to our poor parents that you never won a prize all the time you were at school."

David winced. The prizes of life had never been within his reach, and yet he had always done his best. A big, square man, with none of the athlete's grace, only clumsy with an ill-directed strength. A silent man, with none of the attractions of thoughtfulness or the influence of hidden wisdom. An earnest man, yet with no power of expressing anything which he really thought or felt. So the world had been always hard on David, and though it was not his fault that it had, perhaps it was not the world's either, seeing that the world has little time and less opportunity for diving into the secret chambers of the soul and finding out the hidden treasure there. There is only one shaft sunk into such natures as these, and the head of it God holds in heaven, and others never go down it unless their name is Love, and God sends them as His special messenger.

"Here, David," continued his sister, "I will weed them out, and you need only look at the best—and there is no doubt which that is," she added after a quick perusal of the heap. "It is signed by Beatrice Holt."

"Yes, it is wonderfully correct," said David; "but let me look ——"

"Now, do be quiet," snapped Georgina, "and

not worry yourself about any of the others. I tell you that this is undoubtedly the first, and instead of taking my word for it you must needs want to go over the work yourself, too. A nice compliment that is to me. As if my judgment were not to be relied upon!"

"Indeed, I have great confidence in your judgment, Georgina."

"And well you need have. I should like to see what would have become of you without it. For when we lost our parents there was no one but me to look after you."

"You have indeed looked after me," replied David, and a faint smile lurked round his mouth.

"And little thanks I get for it. But that is the way of the world. Women have most of the work and none of the thanks; and men are spoiled from the cradle upwards."

"It is very late," remarked David; "time for you to be going to bed."

"I shall not go before you," and Georgina's voice was very determined. "How should I know that the lights were properly put out, and the house safe from fire?"

David picked up the examination papers without a word. He was a thorough man, and had been one ever since he found that he was not a

popular boy. In his teens he had taken life seriously, and seemed quite as old as Georgina directly he was of age. It was because of this innate manliness that his sister devoted herself to his discipline. Georgina would never have troubled to reform any one whom she felt was not worthy of her enormous reforming powers. She admired David in her secret heart, but she deemed approbation a pernicious diet for mankind, and she felt it her mission in life to rub off all the scanty gilt with which his gingerbread might have been adorned, had she devoted herself to making his home pleasant rather than punitive.

"There is no need for you to work any more to-night," she said snappishly. But her brother only smiled.

"The papers of Miss Paterson's girls are not very hard work," he said quietly. Fortunately David Carpenter was blessed with a temper sufficiently equable even to stand against the perpetual improvement of his character at the hands of Georgina. He never tried to improve her, which was just as well, seeing that her temper was made of just the opposite material.

It was a spotlessly neat and careful paper that David picked out, but, alas ! it was not so correct as the other. He read it carefully ; his impassive

face clouded over as he pictured Ursula's disappointment. He thought again of her little pleading face, and the pathetic expression in her eyes, and a slight sigh escaped him as he folded her unsuccessful effort up again.

"There, David!" interrupted Georgina, "I can tell how tired you are; I wish you would not be so stupid as to take so little care of yourself. It gives me a great deal of unnecessary anxiety."

"Good-night, Georgina. I suppose you refused Miss Paterson's invitation for me on Thursday night?"

"No, I did not. I accepted it."

"But I never go to parties, you know; I detest them."

"That is of no importance," remarked his sister coolly as she folded up her work. "And it would offend Miss Paterson seriously if you were not to be there, seeing that you teach at her school."

"What a terrible bore! But I suppose it cannot be helped now."

"Helped, indeed! I should think not. Why, if it were not for me, you would not have a single friend in the place."

But herein Georgina was mistaken. If it had

not been for her David Carpenter might have had several more of them.

The prize-giving at the Grammar School was the greatest pageant Ursula had ever seen, and it filled her small soul as full as all pageants will the hearts of those who really see them. When the masters entered in procession wearing their caps and gowns, and amid the deafening cheers of the boys, Ursula could hardly keep from crying. She listened to the speeches with an eager excitement which flamed in her eyes, and painted her pale cheeks crimson. The dull old county magnate who distributed the prizes seemed to her a kind of uncrowned king, and her hands smarted with clapping at every pause in his wearisome oration. When the boys began to come up, her heart beat faster and faster till she almost choked with emotion as Merton Wainwright's name was called out and he walked up to the platform with that fearless, confident air which filled Ursula with fresh floods of admiration. There was no boy in the school who had won so many prizes as he, and the old baronet in the chair said a few words of special and conventional commendation. Ursula forgot all her own small ambitions in his triumphs, and though he told her not to bother when she congratu-

lated him afterwards, the boy was gratified by the intensity of her adulation.

"You do like me, don't you, Merton?" she added a little wistfully, for somehow his success seemed to have lifted him so far above her.

"Of course I do. What rot!" replied the hero.

"Do you like me as much as you do your sister Gladys?" she persisted, having always a feeling of envy for the schoolfellow who was blessed with such a brother as Merton for her very own.

"I don't think you are either very pretty," he observed judicially, "but you are much cleverer, and I like you best."

Then Ursula's cup was full, and she began to realise that the approval of some one else's brother might be as much worth having as that of one's own. She was not old enough to know then that it might even exceed it.

"But Gertrude is pretty," she added, referring to the grown-up Miss Wainwright.

"And vain!" remarked Merton scornfully.

"Gladys told me she was vain," continued Ursula in a shocked voice. "She actually looks in the glass to do her hair. Gladys caught her at it."

"Well, I like your face best, even though it isn't pretty," said the boy thoughtfully.

"Oh, Merton! how good of you!" And Ursula's day was a very happy one indeed.

It was fortunate that it was, for the morrow brought the crushing disappointment of losing the Latin prize for which she had worked so hard.

"It was a painful surprise to me that you failed," her father told her on their return home.

"I couldn't help it, daddy. I tried my very best," and a sob caught in her throat.

The trouble in her eyes drew David Carpenter out of his way, and he followed them up to the garden gate. Then he stood silent, not knowing exactly why he had come. But Mr. Grey helped him out of the difficulty.

"It must have been a disappointment to you, her master, as well as to me, her father, that Ursula did so badly," he began in his metallic voice.

"But she did not do badly," David hastily interposed, seeing the child's face whiten.

"Results, Mr. Carpenter! Results!" exclaimed Mr. Grey fussily. "They are a sure indication."

David's thoughts wandered back over all his

own efforts and strivings, and the few and worthless results he had to show for them; but he did not know how to refute Mr. Grey's assertion. Instead, he smiled at Ursula, and said gently,—

"You did very well indeed. You would have won the prize if Beatrice Holt had not been so much older."

Ursula crept after him as he turned away.

"Oh, Mr. Carpenter!" she whispered. "My mind is chock full of miserableness," and then the big tears overflowed, and one fell on his coat sleeve.

"Don't cry," imploringly. "Don't cry, my dear," he added in a shamefaced way, and then hurried off up the hill with feelings of a most unjust vindictiveness against the successful Beatrice.

Miss Paterson's party was from seven o'clock till ten. It began with coffee and cake, and ended with sandwiches and lemonade; and between the two, people sat in stiff rows in the drawing-room, listening to the rendering of "William Tell" as a duet on the piano, and "The Charge of the Light Brigade" as a recitation, together with selections of the other accomplishments of Miss Paterson's pupils.

David Carpenter lounged in the doorway, wish-

ing with all his might that he were at home. And Ursula knelt on the landing peeping through the banisters, as she was not one of the girls who was considered advanced enough to add to any of the performances.

The Wainwrights were among the latest arrivals, an awkwardness having arisen in the crack of Gertrude's waistband as she sneezed on her way downstairs. It took a little time to rectify this catastrophe, during which Mr. Wainwright paced the hall like a caged lion, and his wife endeavoured to soothe and divert him after the manner of all wise wives whose husbands somebody is keeping waiting.

"Why cannot girls have their clothes fastened on with decent buttons and tapes?" fumed the draper. "There are surely plenty of such-like on the premises!"

"Oh, papa! what a coarse allusion!" exclaimed his wife reprovingly. "But I think dear Gertrude has filled out a bit since she wore her evening frock, and a sneeze is always trying, even in only one's Sunday best."

"I have no patience with girls being trussed up like fowls that are ready for cooking," continued Mr. Wainwright crossly. "I have a great mind to go on and leave her to walk. I expect a

lot of folks are waiting for this fly when it has taken us."

"She is just coming," said her mother soothingly. "Make haste, Gertrude. Papa is tired of waiting."

Now the elder Miss Wainwright possessed certain undeniable attractions. In face she exactly resembled a twopenny china doll, and we all know that such are blessed with glossy black hair, and bright dark eyes, as well as unimpeachable red and white complexions. She also had plenty to say for herself, and a not ugly, though perhaps slightly noisy laugh, which tended to make her a cheerful companion. Her mind, after she had entered her twenties, became possessed with the one idea of matrimony, and the present person she had fixed upon as suitable to fill her vacant situation was David Carpenter. Indeed Winstow could not boast of many marriageable men, and, as Gertrude had confided in a friend, "it looked as if David Carpenter would have to be Hobson's choice."

Of these intentions the Grammar School master was entirely ignorant. The thought of marrying had never entered his head; indeed, his sister's presence in his home had induced him to think of life as more restful without permanent

feminine companionship, and even as an acquaintance Miss Wainwright appeared to him singularly distasteful. But of this she also was ignorant.

"How hot these rooms are!" she said to him with a sigh. "Don't you think it would be cooler in the garden, Mr. Carpenter—and nicer?" she added coquettishly.

"Yes," answered David, and then the baldness of his reply made him uncomfortable. "Much cooler," he repeated lamely.

"How sweet the castle looks in the moonlight!" she remarked presently. "And to make it perfect we ought to hear the bubbling river. Hush! How silent it is!"

"The tide is up," said David shortly.

"Do you know, Mr. Carpenter," and Gertrude looked up at him archly, "I love the moonlight, only I cannot bear to be in it alone."

"No?"

"It always has such an effect on my spirits. I am very sensitive, you know, and easily upset."

David glanced at her very apple-like cheek, and bright beady-black eyes with wonder. She always seemed to him the very opposite of sensitive.

"Naughty man!" she exclaimed, tapping his

arm with a crackly satin fan. "To look at me so!"

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed in distress.

"I will forgive you this once," she continued with a giggle, "but you must give over, you really must, or I shall have to go indoors. Mamma is so particular."

David wondered whatever she could be talking about, and then Gertrude went on:

"It must be lonely for you living up so far out of the town," with a look which she intended to indicate how pleased she should be to enliven his solitude.

"I have my sister, and besides I am very little at home."

"Oh! we all know what a sister is! So different from—well, other things," and she laughed coyly.

David could not think of anything to say, so, being a man, he did not say it.

"You must long for a companion," she continued.

"No," he replied slowly. "I am quite content." And then the thought of his unrestful home falsified his words, and he added, "At least, if I am not that, I get on as well as other fellows."

"Fie, fie! Mr. Carpenter!" and Gertrude shook a warning finger at him, "you are letting pussy out of the bag. But you will find something or somebody to make you quite content one of these days, never fear."

"Would you like anything to eat?" asked David in desperation, hoping he might thereby escape; and then Georgina's voice was heard:

"David, David! Where are you? Come in immediately," and for once he was glad of his sister's interference.

"My boy has done well this year," said Mr. Wainwright, whom he joined on the outskirts of the drawing-room.

"He has, indeed;" and David's face brightened as he absently helped himself to a dried sandwich, which, owing to domestic zealousness, had been cut many hours, and many warm hours, previously. "I expect great things of Merton."

"He is a clever lad," exclaimed his father proudly. "And when I christened him after my old uncle Merton as a kind of reward for taking me into partnership, I hoped that he might grow up with a head on his shoulders."

"There is no doubt about that; you and all of us will be very proud of him some day."

"I don't hold with going to college myself,"

Mr. Wainwright continued; "but if the lad's set on it, and can win the wherewithal, it is not for me or his mother to raise any objection."

"It would be a great pity if you did," interrupted David. He was thinking of the wonderful joy of those first days of his at Oxford, before he found out that he was not brilliant as other men, but destined only for the honourless low-lying levels of life. Still David, though personally disappointed, was selfless enough to glory in the exploits of others, and to rejoice with a quiet exhilaration in the rare atmosphere of culture and scholarship which hangs round the ancient city like the afterglow of a sun that has set. Once he had dreamed of honours; but he worked slowly, and the time only brought him a pass. He had never spoken of his degree since, and it cut like a whip when Georgina, according to her wont, reminded him continually of it.

"My word, David!" remarked that lady with emphasis, as they started on their homeward way. "A nice talk there will be about you and Gertrude Wainwright to-morrow."

"Talk! What about?" And her brother looked surprised.

"Sitting in the garden alone in the moonlight. How could you be so indiscreet?"

"I could not help it," he replied simply.

"Not help it, forsooth! You are a very six-year-old for helplessness, David. I suppose you will say you could not help it when you are up for breach of promise."

David wiped his brow in a sudden heat.

"I cannot imagine what you are talking about, Georgina," he exclaimed hoarsely. But he could.

"You must take better care of yourself," continued his sister. "I never saw such a forward minx as that Wainwright girl in all my life."

"But, Georgina," and his voice rang with a pleading anxiety, "surely you were only joking when you spoke about such an awful thing as a —a breach of promise?"

"There will be no more joking when it comes to that, I can tell you," she replied ruthlessly.

And then David's spirit rose.

"Good heavens! I will never speak to the girl again!" he muttered fiercely. And though he was frequently obliged to do so, it was not long before Gertrude Wainwright confided in one, Lucy Holt, that she would not have David Carpenter as a gift—"not if you were to crown her," an improviso which was manifestly impossible to occur.

CHAPTER III

THRESHOLDS

YEAR after year went by, and the prize days, both at the Grammar and Miss Paterson's schools, regularly rolled round, with no perceptible difference, except in the growing of the children as they ran up their teens and came within sight of the threshold of a wider life. Merton Wainwright carried all before him, and finally bore the school-scholarship in triumph to Oxford. And Ursula Grey grew up after him as quickly as she could—toiling through many failures and few successes, forgetting the anguish of the many in the joy of the few. The same brave, uncomplaining spirit, and the same weak, often-suffering body, fought their incessant battle up through her growing years, till womanhood touched with sweeter lines her small, sad face; and the unselfish care and tender sympathy for others, which her lot had taught her so young, shone in the depths of her large grey eyes, and made her almost beautiful. Her duty towards her father was the ruling passion of her life, and

her friendship and admiration for Merton Wainwright its recreation. The ordinary aspects of good daughterhood were far too limited for her ideals. She felt how fearfully her father's life had been blighted by the death of his wife, and she read into his thin character the depth of grief and loss which her own vivid sensibilities outlined —and so with infinite patience she bore his irritability, imagining that it was but the fretting of a wounded spirit; with unfailing tenderness she sympathised with all his petty aches and pains, remembering that her mother would never have failed to do so; and with untiring effort she strove to fill the empty place in his life, sharing responsibilities which were too heavy for her girlish shoulders, and trying to bring what sunshine she could into his clouded home. And he, with the selfishness of a shallow nature, accepted all this as his right, and never gave a thought to its cost. He was injured with Providence for the way he had been treated, and so felt he did well to complain. Ursula was his only child, and he took for granted that he had a right to all she could possibly give him, and also was often aggrieved that she could not give more. He was puny and rather delicate, and so thought much about his own health, with an intolerance of any

one else's ailments which such poaching on his particular preserves as an invalid surely deserved. So by looking continually into little, mean thoughts and feelings, Frederick Grey himself grew smaller and more mean; while Ursula, with a pathetic powerlessness to reach the heights of more than filial dutifulness, which she had painted for herself up in the clouds, yet gradually grew up towards that higher ideal to which all virtues are but stepping stones, and by her strivings after an impossibility she came nearer to that possibility of daughterhood which is as the polished corners of the temple.

But for the slow procession which is ever moving onward from childhood's play to old age peace, Winstow was unaltered and unspoiled. A few years could write little change on the monument of centuries—and the same sunshine which comes with every summer, lit up its hills, was reflected in its river, and painted with a glittering line the far-off horizon of the sea. The same soft rainy winds blew up from the west, brought down the russet leaves, and carpeted the country with a cloth of gold. And the people, too, who had once passed the rubicon which made them men and women, seemed to stand still together with the rest of the Winstow world. A few grey

hairs among Georgina Carpenter's black plaits, a few deep lines on David's patient face. A few more wrinkles cut across Mrs. Wainwright's ample forehead, a little more knowledge in her daughter's empty head. Changes too small for an outsider to take note of—but milestones, nevertheless, upon that road which seemed so long in childhood's days, so short when once we leave off playing by the wayside, and take our place in the marching ranks of the great army of life.

"Ursula!" called Mr. Grey from the sitting-room where he was imprisoned by an attack of gout, "bring me my medicine, will you? Thank you, my dear, and just run upstairs for those papers I left in my bedroom—those I was looking at last night. But move this cushion first. You cannot imagine how painful it is to be such a prisoner, and to such an active man as myself."

"Oh yes, daddy, I can," and the girl's voice rang pleasantly. "I am so sorry for you, dear."

Mr. Grey put on his spectacles. "Make haste for I want those papers, Ursula. Why, these are not the right ones," he exclaimed, querulously, as she came breathlessly back with a packet. "I must have left them in my coat pocket. Look in my overcoat which is in the hall, and if they

are not there, run up again and look in the chest of drawers."

"Yes, father. Are not these the ones you want?" As after having drawn both places blank she opened his writing desk.

"Yes, yes, thank you!" he replied fussily. "Now bring the ink near and make me a fresh pen. And I want my seal. I think I left it on my dressing-table."

So Ursula ran up and downstairs incessantly on her father's behests, and Mr. Grey was utterly unconscious of how much trouble he gave, which is the way with many invalids.

"I wish I was not tired enough to feel cross," she thought to herself as she sank down on to an easy chair at last. "I can help showing it, of course, and I think I generally do. But I ought to help feeling it." And a little pucker gathered between her eyebrows.

"My dear," remarked Mr. Grey, "I do not like to see you sitting idle. It is a bad habit for young people."

Ursula picked up her knitting without a word.

"You see," continued her father, "now that you are grown up I feel it incumbent on me to remind you that life is made up of work instead of play. You must put away childish things, Ursula, and

turn your attention to earning the remuneration which is necessary for the maintenance of our home here."

"Are we poorer than we used to be?" the girl asked quickly, wondering what fresh economies she could possibly practise.

"My health," continued Mr. Grey, "is not what it used to be. In fact, I am a broken-down man, and I need more rest. Under these circumstances my business must of necessity decline; indeed, lately it has done so steadily, and I have no power to prevent it. Therefore, Ursula, we must seek other sources of income to augment the little we can confidently expect that I shall be able to earn."

"There is not much that a girl can do," said Ursula slowly.

"Surely you would not wish to see my declining years robbed of the few comforts that lessen the burden of my ill-health?" asked her father in an aggrieved tone.

"Oh, no, daddy dear; I was only wondering how much I should be able to earn to help you." And the girl's spirits rose again at the call of his need, and she forgot how tired she was in the glow of this new excitement.

"I may not long be here," continued Mr. Grey

in doleful tones, "but that makes it only the more necessary for you to be doing something on your own account, as when I am gone your home will be gone too."

"You must not talk like that," interrupted Ursula, "for you are quite young still, father."

"Age is nothing when compared with ill-health to which I have been for so long a victim. Your future is a great burden to me, Ursula."

"Don't worry about it," said the girl soothingly. "I have always been able to look after myself, you know, dear."

"You speak as if you had had to look after yourself," interposed Mr. Grey. "That is a very painful insinuation to me, Ursula, who have always been such a kind, indulgent father, and you will be sorry for having said it when I am gone and you have to stand alone."

"Oh, you know I did not mean that." And Ursula laid her cheek against his coat sleeve. "We have always pulled together, you and I. But I did not want you to be anxious or bothered."

"As if I could help it. You young people are so feckless. But when I am laid by, as I have been these last few days, I am not able to keep

my thoughts from serious considerations, as you would do. I am obliged to consider the future, though it is worry enough, heaven knows. To think that I, who am descended from that noble family of the Greys of Leyswood, should have to worry about ways and means! It is sickening. But that is the way of the world in these dreadful democratic days. The good old families are trampled under foot, and the upstarts have all the prizes. I wish you had been a boy, Ursula."

"Then who would have knitted your socks, and made your beef tea?" laughed the girl. "No, daddy, we can look after each other best as we are."

"You are too light-hearted, my child. It is a serious fault."

"Good spirits are half the battle, you know. Don't be depressed, dear."

"Ah, it is different for you who are young and strong;" and her father sighed deeply. It had never struck him that the least strong person in his household was Ursula herself, and that she was already old in care and responsibility. But it had for so long been her business to cheer and comfort her father that it had become her second nature. She had such strong ideas of

duty, and she meant to do hers even if she died in the attempt. So do we resolve in the early days of life, not knowing that to live in the attempt is the more common and perhaps harder task to which we shall be called. The ruling power in Ursula's mind was duty, but it was a stern master nevertheless. She struggled to obey it, and let nothing hide it from her, but she felt it made life very hard and tiring. Her idea of religion was embodied in it, and she knew nothing of the green pastures and still waters in the country which God's children call their home. Because of this duty to her father she checked each petulant word which rose to her lips at his hasty and narrow judgments; stifled every complaint when he worked her beyond her strength; and more than these, felt real affection for him because she was his daughter. And now, when he spoke of a new duty in the way of adding to their income, she was, as usual, ready to obey the call. But of aught besides duty Ursula had had little experience. Life was always lesson-time with her, and from a child she had ever been eager to learn her lessons well.

"It must be something that will not take me altogether away from home," she observed

thoughtfully, "because of you. What do you suggest, father?"

"You had better consult Georgina Carpenter, my dear. She is a great authority on woman's work."

Ursula felt a sudden flash of impatience. She did not like Georgina, and she always resented her interference.

"Georgina," continued Mr. Grey, "is a woman in whom I feel the greatest confidence. I admire the strength and vigour of both her body and mind."

"I can't bear people who have never been ill," exclaimed Ursula.

"Do not let me hear you use again so strong an expression as 'can't bear,'" remarked her father severely, "especially when applied to one of my friends."

The girl felt that an apology was her duty, but she did so dislike Georgina. However, according to her custom, duty prevailed, and she said quietly:

"I am sorry, father, if I vexed you; but somehow Georgina never understands me. I feel she disapproves of me whatever I do."

"Of course she understands you," he replied testily—it never having struck him that there

was anything below the surface in Ursula to understand. "And you should get out of the way of forming wrong and harsh judgments of people, Ursula. Georgina has your welfare very much at heart. She was only reminding me the other day how bad it is for girls to have nothing to do as they grow older, and indeed suggested to me the advisability of your earning something towards your own support."

Ursula bit her lip lest she should reply indignantly.

"Of course it is very painful to me," continued Mr. Grey, "to feel that a daughter of mine, who bears so distinguished a name, should have to work for pecuniary considerations. I said so to Georgina, and she was most sympathetic, and comforted me with the assurance that noble birth cannot be touched by the injustice of circumstances; and that you would still be Ursula Grey, even though you might be a governess or working in any way for your living. The Carpenters are well connected themselves, Ursula?"

"I dare say," replied the girl listlessly.

"Georgina brought me an old book which belongs to her brother, and which interested me extremely. It is a county history, and tells how

there was a David Carpenter in the seventeenth century, who was quite a man of note. Of course the Greys date further back. Georgina said she would look through another of the volumes which might make mention of Leyswood, and let me have it. Oh! and I forgot. She was speaking about your health, too, Ursula. She thinks you do not take enough exercise, and that gives you such a washed-out appearance."

"I take as much as I can," pleaded the girl, "but Georgina doesn't know what it means to feel tired."

"But it is not right for young people to be feeling this and that," continued her father, reprovingly, "and you must not give way to it, Ursula. At your age I never thought about such a thing as being tired. And Georgina says that it is a great danger in this generation letting the young people give way to every little sensation instead of hardening themselves into strong men and women."

Tears filled the girl's eyes. She tried so hard to hide her weakness, and to never let her constant suffering and want of strength impair her usefulness, or even be suspected in her daily life. And it was all for her father's sake, which made Georgina's accusations doubly hard from his lips.

"There is no need for you to be sulky," he said querulously. "Most young people dislike being told of their faults, but it is for their good."

Ursula, who had never been sulky in her life, felt the hopelessness of any attempt at explanation. Instead she said with a sad gentleness:

"Do you feel as if you would be able to fancy a little supper, daddy? You ate nothing at tea, you know."

Mr. Grey brightened up; the subject interested him, for there was something equally pleasant in the recollection of a past poor appetite and a present one which might yield to tempting.

"What are you going to give me, my dear?"

"I will make an omelette. That is both light and nourishing." And Ursula hurried into the kitchen, for their domestic was not equal to invalid cookery.

It was late that night before Ursula was free to go to bed. The strain of the day's work was heavy on her, but the strain of keeping up a conversation which would neither irritate nor bore her father was heavier still. While his foot was bad he was unable to go to his office, and so Ursula had him on her hands the whole day

through. It was days such as these that brought into the girl's heart a great longing for that mother who went away before her little daughter knew how much she wanted her. She imagined that fair ideal, which is so glad a reality in countless homes, of the sweet womanly spirit which smoothes away all the difficulties, and clears up all the misunderstandings, and holds the help which all the needs demand. She treasured the picture of the precious presence of motherhood which so many other happier children see. And there was nothing which Ursula did not believe would have been all right if only her mother had been there. Sad it is for those who yearn as she did for the great gift of mother love, but infinitely sadder is it when the mother is there and yet the home is bereft of that ideal of motherhood, which is happily so much more often realised than any other; but when it fails leaves a great sore gap both in fact and in fancy, which nothing else can ever fill.

So as the girl entered her bare little bedroom, where a hard-won examination certificate was the one ornament, she felt that her life was desolate, and the old longing came sweeping over her again as it had been wont to do ever since she began to grow up, for a mother or

even sister of her own. The easy understanding of womenkind in the countless little trials and vexations of everyday life, as well as for the deeper bond of a true friendship within the sacred circle of home. So she opened her window in an inexplicable yearning for some one or something outside herself, stretching out empty arms to the great hollow of darkness, and knowing nothing of the help that is not far from any one of us. The cold, pale moon gliding out from behind a heavy cloud suddenly frosted the landscape and lit up the waters of the distant estuary till they gleamed as a band of steel. The keen February air rushed in and struck her face and cheek with its sharp breath, but it was a deeper cold than that of outside which made her shiver through and through. Her sorrowful eyes roved round the whole, wide, grey outlook, but there was no sign of colour, or of comfort, or of warmth. It looked like a different world to that which glowed in sunset beauty, or slept in summer peace, and its chill influence touched her sensitive soul with an icy hand, and whispered incoherent messages of misery and gloom.

"I wish I had somebody to help me!" she sighed, and a tear fell on the window-sill. "Somebody who would understand. Father is

very good, of course, but he likes me to talk to and take care of him, and oh! I want somebody who will talk with and take care of me. I am so young, and yet so tired. I remember when I was very little somebody used to carry me up to bed and undress me without my knowing, and it was all cosy warm firelight, and I was so sleepy. I wish," and the girl's eyes were filled with the hunger of her poor starved soul, "I wish I could have that old, dear, 'comfy' feeling once again!"

The silence of the night borne on the still breath of an east wind filled her room. The candle flickered in the socket, and the boards creaked, and Ursula felt for the moment utterly alone. And then with the rush of reaction there came that whisper of hope which is but the voice of our guardian angel. A message of promise which we cannot define and therefore we call it hope, but it is more than that in fact. It is the blessed assurance of what is, rather than what shall be, only we are blind who shall one day see.

And this hope—she hardly knew of what—spread over her whole being, as the sweeping sunshine wings its way across a whole shadow-land of cloud. The throb of life which seems to

sleep under the stars woke up again in her heart and beat strongly with the vigour of spring; and Ursula, in her ignorant wandering, drew near to the eternal and felt the uplifting rapture of its touch. Then, because that which is dearest and best on earth is most closely linked with the beauty and joy of heaven, the girl's mind filled with many dear, familiar pictures, which will always be our comfort till our sight is strong enough for beatific visions. Pictures of homely happiness, and sunny days, and dreams of love. Where did these guardian angels of ours learn their knowledge of our human hearts, unless in the days when they, too, were with us in the bonds of love on earth? In all the hosts of heaven could any one have known so well how to comfort Ursula as her mother did just then? Inexplicable mystery, which those who need it not throw on one side as past belief! But to those whose hearts are torn in two, and whose treasure is laid up in heaven, there comes this blessed comfort for those who mourn, and with eyes washed clear by many tears they look up and see that they already "are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God"; "to an innumerable company of angels," and "to the spirits of just men made perfect."

It was with a smile on her lips that at last Ursula fell asleep. And with the morning came the new glad life of another day, and the true perspective which readjusts the distorted shapes of thought which loom so large in the darkness. The yellow light of morning lay low above the distant hills, and the clean, cold wind from which all bitterness had faded, leaving only its freshness behind, blew across the low-lying meadowland and brought the sweet smell of the springing earth right into the streets and houses of the little town. The breakfast-table looked smiling in its white cloth and shining silver, as breakfast-tables do when they greet us hungry and cold, and it had a special welcome for Ursula in the fat letter it held beside her plate.

Merton Wainwright's Oxford days were over, and had ended in highest honours, and now he had to tell her of another and even greater success. He had passed highest into the Civil Service, and so won a long-coveted position in one of the government offices. Merton's letters were just like himself—neither better nor worse, but just full of his own strong personality, and alive with a regular jumble of thoughts and words and wishes. His letter seemed to light up the whole room from out of its thick square envelope. We

have all known and loved such letters, and lived on them whole, happy days. Ursula rejoiced with Merton's joy, and caught the exhilaration of his excitement, entering into all his plans and thoughts. They had kept up their childish friendship, and it had grown with their growing years. The refinements of Oxford had lifted Merton above his solid, unattractive home, and set him at a far distance from the showy, common sisters there. But it had taught him to appreciate Ursula more and more. To admire the well-bred pluck which brought her bravely through so many storms; to believe in the perfect taste which was her never-failing instinct; to confide in the understanding sympathy which begins in good manners but does not end this side Heaven. So the first letter about this greatest success was written to her, and Ursula smiled, as many happy women have done before her, in the knowledge that it was to her that he had written first.

All the day's duties were tinged with rose-colour because of that letter the postman had brought. Merton would do great things in his new life, and rise to great heights in the new world of his profession, and win great prizes in the coming years. And what was better still he

was coming home to Winstow the following week, to tell Ursula all about it.

In the afternoon she walked up to see Georgina Carpenter, according to her father's wishes.

It was a bright spring day, when the roads are whitened with dust, and the red brown woods stand out against the indigo distances. When the sunshine is cold and clear, and the evergreens a glossier green than usual in the pale yellow sheen of the sun. But the air was light and keen, and it filled Ursula with a quick, fleeting power of feeling strong and walking fast. The hill seemed short, and the roadside lined with plans and pictures of how Merton would get on, and how she would never fail him, but grow, too, by work and thought, and many books, so that he should always find in her a companion as well as a friend. She would earn money, and she did not mind now that Georgina should counsel her, and with it buy all that she should need to keep Merton pleased with her. So a thousand castles in the air rose up and crowned the hilltops, and the far-distant country on the other side of the channel gave her that sense of wideness that we want when any big design or feeling fills our minds.

Georgina Carpenter sat at her writing-table,

and the room smelt of business and red tape. Ursula could never remember Georgina's looking any different, but the big handsome face was harder, and the lines more determined than when Miss Carpenter first undertook to discipline the world.

She had chosen for herself this thankless task, and her views grew sterner and her ways more managing as she deliberately set herself to walk in so unlovely a path. It may be well for mankind to be disciplined, but it is not well to be the woman who turns her world into a dame school, and administers her petty justice therein with the rod of vigorous interference or a sharp tongue. But the improvement of David's character and the suppression of his undoubted faults seemed curiously to Georgina to be her work rather than the amelioration of her own character and the mending of her own misdoings—a mistake which is not seldom made in ordinary domestic life.

She did not rise when Ursula entered, for she was usually too busy to be well-mannered.

"How do you do? Wait a moment," she remarked brusquely, "I am just finishing the proofs of a pamphlet which must go by to-night's post; but I will attend to you directly."

Ursula wandered to the window.

"Oh, there is Mr. Carpenter!" she exclaimed, "does he know about Merton, I wonder? I must go and tell him."

"Stop!" cried Georgina hastily. "You had better not disturb him, Ursula. He has gone out for a quiet hour in the garden after his school work, and said that he was on no account to be interrupted."

"But he would be so pleased to hear how splendidly Merton has done," persisted Ursula, fighting a little at Georgina's management.

"I will tell him directly he comes in," continued that lady in her most determined voice; "but I cannot allow his orders to be disobeyed. He would be exceedingly angry."

Ursula half smiled at the idea of David Carpenter's being "exceedingly angry" with any one. He was just the same kind, silent man that he used to be, only now Ursula was grown up he was still more shy of her than he was in her childhood's days. It was a pity, Ursula felt, because she knew that he was both nice and good, and she would have liked to be friendly with him, only it was impossible. For when Georgina's fencing round her brother was broken down there was still the wall of his own reserve

which shut him in from all intimate companionship.

Sometimes the girl wondered whether it was because he did not like her that he kept her at so great a distance, and then she forgot to think about him at all in the hurrying interests of Merton's friendship and all the vivid feeling of her own life. It was only at such moments as these, when she stood idly watching him through a window, that Ursula thought at all of David Carpenter.

She saw him pacing up and down the garden path, occasionally stopping to catch some bird's whistle, and to mimic it with a true note. She watched him stoop to stroke the cat as it rubbed up against his leg, and noticed that his grave face lighted up with a smile at the shy approach of the young magpie which was one of his pets. He was so big and strong, though his limbs hung badly and his shoulders slightly stooped, and Ursula wondered how any one so powerful as he looked could stand Georgina's incessant interference. She would not if she were a strong man instead of a little weak girl, and the irritation against that lady rose afresh as she felt she had a right to go and tell his old master the good news of Merton's success. She was so proud of

it, and so eager to tell of it, especially to one who would appreciate it as much as David would. What right had Georgina to prevent her? Only the right of a disagreeable temper and a managing disposition, but few things and fewer people can fight against such a right. It was the feeling of impotence as well as indignation which welled up in Ursula's spirit, and caused her to chafe with unusual impatience. There are few people who possess the power of irritation to such an extent as did Georgina Carpenter—and happily there are not very many Georgina Carpenters in the world.

"And now, tell me, child, what it is you want!" she exclaimed, with a postage stamp between her lips, and the smell of a smouldering candle, by the help of which she had sealed her parcel, pervading the room.

"I want something to do," said Ursula turning round with a start. Georgina nodded her head. She was not so ignorant of the management of the Greys' finances as Ursula imagined. Mr. Grey had unlimited confidence in Georgina, and he liked talking with, as well as listening to her.

"What can you do?" she asked, coming straight to the point as usual.

"Oh, I suppose most things," replied the girl vaguely.

"I should suppose hardly anything," continued Georgina reprovingly. "You can't write shorthand, or type-write, or cook, or nurse, or teach, except in the most elementary way."

"I could teach, I think," interrupted Ursula. "I passed the senior Oxford, you know, and took honours in literature and Latin."

"Knowing a thing is one thing and teaching it is another," remarked her mentor tritely. "You are not old enough or dignified enough for a schoolmistress. Indeed, that childish manner and face are very much against you."

"I am not childish," the girl interposed. "I wish to heaven I could be!" and she sighed slightly.

Georgina looked up sharply.

"Young women of over twenty years of age ought to have done with such nonsense as childish feelings—I have no patience with you, Ursula, talking like that, with the battle of life before you."

"I am ready enough for the battle," and Ursula spoke a little haughtily; "indeed I enlisted for it long enough ago."

"And it is time you were supporting yourself

now," continued Miss Carpenter, taking no notice of the interruption, "for your poor father cannot stand any extra burden."

Ursula's eyes flashed, and, but for that stern sense of duty which was always clasped round her heart, she would have answered indignantly.

"I think father is better than he used to be," she answered slowly, but there was fire underneath her voice.

"He needs to be saved," said Georgina sincerely, and Ursula's face softened.

"I want to save him," she answered. "I am always trying to do so. For it is so hard to be ailing continually, so specially hard for a man."

"It is hard enough for a man of your father's family and refinement to be tied down to the uncongenial work and society of a little country town."

Georgina was quite ready to sympathise with Mr. Grey, but she never took account of ill-health. It was one of those abnormal developments which never entered her scheme of thought or life. She regarded it, at the bottom of her heart, as unpleasant in the old, and blameworthy in the young. She could do her duty in the way of dispensing medicines or even making poultices, but the task disgusted her, and she knew nothing

of that tender pity for all suffering which is to be found in almost every woman's nature. David had never been ill for a day in his life, and this she felt was due more to her judicious training than to any accident of constitution or strength. And as for herself, she would have felt disgraced for life if ever she had sunk so low as taking her breakfast in bed.

"But he has some nice friends here, and many old ones," argued Ursula, "and that means much, even in a country town."

"Nonsense. There are the Wainwrights—good enough people in their way, but no companions for your father. But now to return to business. You might learn indexing or typewriting," observed Georgina meditatively, "but that would entail living in London, and you cannot be spared from home at present," she added, thinking aloud. But Ursula's thoughts had rushed off in mad haste at the idea of going to London to work as Merton was to do. She did not realise how many different worlds there are in that great metropolis, and how far away the toiling work-girl would be from the government clerk. It was a pleasant thought, and it exhilarated and diverted her. To be always within reach of Merton was one of her largest

castles, for as yet those castles had never built up the structure of a home.

"But perhaps I might go to London, some day?" she queried eagerly, "and learn big things? Only," and her voice suddenly dropped its tone, "I must do something now. What is there, Miss Carpenter?"

Now Georgina was not too old for the building of castles either. Who of us ever is, until just for the moment when we first find a real castle of our own? The venerable statesman builds them as well as the ambitious schoolboy, the tired mother perhaps as often as the dreamy girl. Only as we grow older our castles have more rooms in them, and we want to fill them with the many people whose lives, and interests, and affections we share. A foolish and fantastic employment our practical selves may tell us, but perhaps for once our practical selves may not be all-wise in trying to drag our eyes and thoughts down to the material and lucrative and earthly, instead of letting them mount up on wings as eagles through the visionary castles of hope and idealism to the gates of the eternal city of God.

Georgina's spirit was aggressive and managing, and her voice sharp and rasping, but deep down underneath it all, where the true self is

hid, there was a longing in her lonely soul for something, she hardly knew what, that would be what the children call her "very own." She knew that her brother did not really love her, and she would have died rather than let it be suspected how much she cared for him. Her home was really his, and she but a lodger, though she ruled it with a rod of iron. The executive work with which she filled her time and mind was cold work, and her ambitions were all stern and ugly ones with which to crown a woman's life. But far away on the distant horizon line she saw the outline of what might be a castle for her—and secretly, and half ashamed at so much weakness, she added a meagre little heap of material for building every now and then. Its form could boast no graceful battlements or stately towers, but was just a plain small house at the edge of Winstow, in which a fussy little man was always calling aloud for the attention she felt she had to give. David did not really want her assistance, she knew, but she never meant to spare him as long as she had breath and strength. She had not been trained to minister to the wants of any of the great classes of need which are to be found in all charitable institutions. So her powers had

run to seed and grown up rough and wild; and Georgina was one of those women who may know of a fault without ever dreaming of correcting it. She knew she was hard and stern and forbidding, and that was the end of it—she *was*. But she also knew that she was not very happy, and she dreamed of days when she might be so, with a home of her own to manage, and a husband of her own to reform. Strange pictures mean happiness to such twisted natures as Georgina's.

"There is precious little such a girl as you can do," continued Miss Carpenter, "for your father's position must be considered. And Miss Paterson's education is nothing nowadays when governesses want certificates. Oh, here is my brother!" as he walked-up and opened the French window which opened on to their tiny lawn. "Go away, David, I am busy." But Ursula had rushed up to him to tell the news of Merton.

"Passed top into the Civil Service!" repeated David, taking no notice of Georgina's protest. "Bravo! the boy has done well. I am proud of him."

"So are we all," echoed Ursula, with shining eyes and faintly flushed cheeks.

"I have not seen to-day's papers yet," said

David, leaning his huge shoulders against the chimney-piece.

"Nor have we. But I had a letter from him this morning telling me all about it," and Ursula spoke without a touch of self-consciousness.

"I wish you would go away, David," interposed his sister, "for Ursula has come to see me on business."

"I want something to do," the girl told him simply, "and Georgina doesn't think I know enough to teach. But I do, don't I, Mr. Carpenter? You taught me, so you ought to know."

"You know a fair amount of Latin," he replied, slowly, "but——"

"But what?" queried Ursula, looking up at him.

"I can imagine you better as a learner than a teacher, somehow," and he smiled that kind smile of his which chased all the gloom and gravity from his face.

"That is what I think," chimed in Georgina; but it was not. Indeed it was the very opposite to what Georgina thought, if only she had known it.

"Surely there is no need for you to work?" he questioned, after a moment's pause.

"I wish you would not interfere, David," exclaimed his sister, angrily. "There is every need

for Ursula to get something to do, and I must beg of you not to give your opinion on a subject about which you know nothing. Indeed, if you will kindly leave us, we shall be able to finish our business."

So David went back into the garden, and Ursula sat and boiled inwardly at Georgina's rudeness to him. She wondered how any woman could speak in such a nagging voice, and do such ugly things, for her own sake, if not for any one else's.

"I know," exclaimed Miss Carpenter, suddenly, "there are the new people at Rennel Hill. Why, it will be just the thing."

"I thought an old lady had come there," said Ursula.

"So she has. But she has two grandchildren living with her whose parents are in India. She will require a daily governess for them. I will arrange it all," decidedly. "And you will have to walk there and back every day."

"I hope it won't be too far for me," and Ursula thought of the three and a half miles up hill early every morning.

"If you have no work in you, you may as well abandon the idea of working," snapped Georgina.

"Oh, I shall not mind it!" and Ursula spoke quickly. She did so hate to give way to her want of strength.

"Old Mrs. Lyall is a very interesting woman," continued Georgina, "for her father, a Sir Robert Wakenham, was a great man at court in her young days. Her mother came from this part of the world, and I believe she was born at old Wathern Palace beyond Winstow."

"Why has she come back here after so long?"

"Oh, because she felt it was not good for the children to live in London, and the old feeling brought her to settle here. Rennel Hill was just empty, and it suited her exactly."

"I wish I might, too," said Ursula, wistfully.

"Well, I will see what I can do," Georgina promised, not unkindly. "Only you must put your shoulder to the wheel, and not expect everything always done for you."

"I will do my best," answered the girl, quietly, and a brave spirit shone through her great grey eyes. "Thank you very much for helping me. Father said you would be sure to be able to."

Georgina looked pleased. "I am always willing to help those who help themselves," she observed graciously; not knowing that it is

woman's dearest mission often to help those who cannot.

As she walked back to Winstow Ursula pulled Merton's letter out of her pocket and read through it all again and again. Who of us does not know that warm feeling of having a letter which will bear re-reading until its successor comes? And Merton's letter was almost as good as a real talk. More like his talks with Ursula than many letters could be, for she was always the listener then, as now; and he had just poured out to her all the hopes and ambitions and youthful boasting, as sure of her ready sympathy and understanding as if he were indeed walking by her side. So with the quickened step of a strong and present interest Ursula sped down the hill, and was soon ready to give herself up to the dear task of writing a letter back to him. She, too, had the power of writing as she felt, and of saying just the very things he liked best to hear; and her letter, as her thoughts, was full of him and his success, and she quite forgot to mention that she, too, that day had stepped over another threshold, and was looking out into a world in which she would have to work. A very different world from that which happier girls see from the windows of a sheltered home.

CHAPTER IV

MERTON WAINWRIGHT

A TALL, handsome young man was walking up and down the platform at Paddington station waiting for the train which was to take him home to the west. He walked with a quick eager step, and there was a glad light in his keen, dark eyes, for he had never looked out on a world which was not full of success for him to grasp, and he had never failed yet in grasping it. In the old days at Winstow Grammar School, Merton Wainwright had been head and shoulders, intellectually, above his fellows; at Oxford he had taken a first, and now he had passed with highest marks into the Civil Service. And it had all been delightful work to him—work which exhilarated rather than tired—a pleasure instead of a task. Moreover, Merton had been popular up at Oriel, and had assimilated there the easy good breeding of men better born than himself. It was easy to make a gentleman of Merton in spite of the draper's shop at Winstow; for those great personal and mental attractions with which na-

ture had so lavishly endowed him gave him a simple assurance in walking through the world which men fighting against any disability, whether social or otherwise, so often lack, and thereby become self-conscious, and even sometimes aggressive. Perhaps it was the spirit of the old, grey-walled school which first lifted the boy on to that higher plane of manly feeling and natural simplicity, that taught him by the example of gentlemen what a gentleman really is, and brought him into touch with the ancient world which wrote its literature and sang its songs long before social smallnesses were ever dreamed of. Anyway, he possessed the natural good manners which so often accompany beauty of physique, and the quick instinct of catching all the little ways and tricks which are so essential a part of what is called good form. Electro-plate, perhaps, instead of hall-marked silver; but some electro-plate is very good, and passes quite easily in the eyes of the world as the genuine article. Merton Wainwright looked at life in this way: some men were well-born and fools, others were rich and ugly; some had good manners, and others strong sinews; every one had something, no one had everything; and his good things were, perhaps, above the average. He

was good at books and at athletics; he was also good to look at and to talk to. On the other hand, he was nobody by birth. That was his only *con* against so many *pros*. Lots of men were much worse off in adding up the *cons*. So with his happy laugh he fearlessly looked Dame Fortune in the face, and thanked her for her many gifts, instead of blaming her for the one withheld. And deep down in his heart, unrevealed to any one except Ursula, he meant to win for himself that one advantage which he had not inherited, and to die a gentleman even if he had not been born one.

To enter one of the government offices had long been Merton's dream. He was a keen politician, and he thought that to be private secretary to a great statesman would be an ideal lot. All of which fate held in store for her darling; and little time was lost before Merton was installed in the one and selected as the other.

As the train rushed down through the clear, cold country on that February day, hope beat very strong in the young man's heart. It was good to go home with his record of success, and it would be nice to tell them all about it. Then there was Ursula, too, to look forward to. None of his triumphs would be complete without her

admiring sympathy and adulation; and she understood things better than his own people did, and could appreciate talk which would be unintelligible to them. Merton was very fond of Ursula, and his fondness lay in the fact that he felt he had somehow made her what she was. It was he who had helped her through that senior Oxford examination in which she did so well. It was his doing that she was interested in worlds outside the Winstow one; his influence that drew her out and taught her to think about deeper things than those which filled his sisters' heads. There was an inquiring look on her small, wan face, and a wistful depth in her beautiful eyes which always drew him to stretch out a helping hand, so that they might be climbing together; and the creative side of Merton's talent found the moulding and the making of a human soul far more interesting and satisfying work than the writing of successful essays or the composition of Latin verse. Ursula was his, for Merton, in the arrogance of success, could not imagine that she would have still been Ursula without him. A different Ursula, perhaps, but not necessarily an inferior one. Her thoughts and opinions were his, and he meant to lead her a long way yet before he would leave her to

think for herself. Then Ursula was socially his superior, which appealed strongly to Merton. She possessed that one qualification of being well-born, to which he attached all the importance which people are wont to do to the things which have been denied them. Whatever we have we know the worth of, how little as well as how much—that is, if we look at life truly with no magnifying-glasses of self-satisfaction, or microscopic ones of depreciation; but of the things which others have, and we have not, we are no real judges, either counting them too high in an envious longing, or too low in a petty jealousy. So Merton thought much of Ursula for being of gentle birth, though, perhaps, not so much as she did of him for his brilliance, his good looks, and his success. And she would be so glad to see him. She always was. Her letter lay warm in his pocket and brought the sense of her companionship very near.

The climax and glory of the Wainwrights' day was high tea at six o'clock. That peculiar form of meal which is a half-caste between breakfast and dinner, with the indigestibleness of supper thrown in. This meal was postponed for an hour owing to Merton's arrival, and he was met in the hall by his mother and sisters,

his father deeming such demonstration a foolish and probably pernicious display in the eyes of the parlour maid and his new partner in the business, by name Albert Cox.

Gertrude Wainwright had become a stout, handsome young woman, and her sister Gladys, who was ten years younger, had grown up into a showy, pert little thing. They wore maroon skirts and their best tartan blouses in Merton's honour. He glanced at their clothes and thought that somehow they looked funny—but then he remembered that he had not been in feminine society for a long while, and had probably forgotten women's ways and looks. Visions of other fellows' sisters flitted across his mind, but then, probably, they were much better looking.

"Tell us all about it, my dear," begged Mrs. Wainwright from behind the substantial silver teapot. "We are all so proud of you, aren't we, papa?"

Mr. Wainwright grunted. He did not approve of praising young men to their faces, especially when they had been so foolish as to throw over a partnership in a good paying concern for any mere advantage of scholarship.

"What shall you be now, Merton?" asked Gertrude. She and Albert Cox sat very near

each other, and there was a guilty look on both their faces which indicated a secret understanding.

"A government clerk," replied Merton, helping himself to sausages.

"What!" thundered Mr. Wainwright.

"Only a clerk!" exclaimed Gladys, while her mother's face turned almost pale.

Merton laughed. "There are clerks and clerks!" he said proudly.

"And I have been wasting my money to make nothing better than a clerk of you after all," stormed Mr. Wainwright. "That is what comes of going up to Oxford and such-like nonsense."

Gertrude glanced shyly at Albert. He was no clerk, but a partner in the business—and when they were married "Wainwright and Cox" was to be painted over the shop, and the old "Merton and Wainwright" rubbed out.

"You don't understand, father," said Merton mildly. "Civil servants are called clerks."

"Servants!" gasped Mrs. Wainwright. "Oh, my boy, my boy! What have you sunk to?" And the poor woman was so upset that she filled up her teacup with coffee by mistake.

Merton laughed again. He always had a sense of humour.

"Don't glory in your shame, that is if you have any left," growled his father.

"But, my dear father, you have no idea what you are talking about," he expostulated.

"Hush, hush! my love," murmured his mother, "papa always knows what he is talking about."

"Surely you are old enough to have learned that by now," remarked Gladys pertly, with her nose in the air; "I have yet to meet the man who doesn't!"

"Come, come, children, don't quarrel! And on Merton's first evening, too. Though I must own," and the good lady shook her head, "the word servant even gave me a turn."

"Then I won't use it again," replied her son smiling. "I shall be a private secretary, perhaps, before very long."

"Like the thing in the play?" suggested Gertrude.

"My eye, he was a wonner!" chimed in Albert Cox, speaking for the first time in a voice loud enough for any one but Gertrude to hear.

"And do you get paid for all this tomfoolery?" asked Mr. Wainwright sulkily, "for I've stood your banker now quite long enough."

"What a mercy uncle John Merton left the boy that legacy!" thought Mrs. Wainwright to

herself, "now that papa seems turning contrary." But aloud she said, "That will be very nice, dear. Such genteel work, too, I should imagine."

"Oh, it's all right, father! I can keep myself," and Merton's face was very pleasant. "I want Mr. Mandeville to take me, awfully; he is a splendid chap."

"Liberal or Tory?" asked Mr. Wainwright.

"Tory—one of the secretaries of state in the present government."

"Tories make me sick!" remarked his father shortly.

"You aren't supposed to have any politics of your own in the Civil Service," explained Merton.

"More like slaves, let alone servants, it seems to me," growled Mr. Wainwright, who was decidedly ruffled.

"Has this Mr. Mandeville any daughters?" asked Gladys, with her forward little smile.

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"My! aren't we innocent!" continued the girl. "I have always heard that the private secretary has a good deal to do with the daughters."

"I don't know the source of your information,"

replied her brother loftily; "but anyway, it is not a reliable one."

"You ought to marry well, Merton," chimed in Gertrude, whose thoughts were running a good deal on matrimony just then.

"What rot!" exclaimed her brother impatiently.

"Time enough to choose a wife when you can keep one," observed Mr. Wainwright.

"Oh, let the poor boy be," said his mother soothingly, "and eat his meal in peace, without worrying about a wife. 'Never meet troubles half way' is what I always say, and it's wonderful the indigestion it saves you, for which there is nothing so bad as worrying at meal times. My aunt Maria taught me that, I have never forgotten it."

"Ta-ta to freedom when once a fellow's spliced," sighed Albert, with a wink; and then he turned up the whites of his eyes to emphasise the brilliance of his pleasantry.

"Get along!" murmured Gertrude coyly, and with a maidenly blush.

"I do hope, my dear," began Mrs. Wainwright rather anxiously, "that it will be all indoor work. Those dreadful races and jumps at Oxford always put me in a flurry for fear you should

neglect to change your clothes and get a chill. And all about the river, too, was so damp without a mother to see your boots and socks were properly dried."

"Indoor work!" echoed her son, "I should rather think it would be. I am afraid my muscles will go to rack and ruin."

"Well, and what of that, love?" chimed in his mother. "Surely gentlemen don't want muscles. You might be a butty collier from the way you talk."

"It always seems to me more refined for a man not to be too muscular," said Gertrude, looking with pride at Albert's puny frame and sloping shoulders. "I don't know what you are laughing at, Merton, I am sure," in an aggrieved voice. But before he could reply the door opened, and the servant announced "Miss Ursula." She was too well known at the Wainwrights ever to be Miss Grey.

"I had to rush in and congratulate Merton," exclaimed the girl brightly, "but I am so sorry to disturb you at tea. You are later than usual."

"Yes, my dear," explained Mrs. Wainwright, "but the boy's train did not get in till nearly seven."

Merton's eyes glowed with welcome. She came with such a fresh-air atmosphere into the stuffy, food-filled room, and he knew she would understand.

"Sit down, sit down," Mrs. Wainwright pressed her.

"Let me take off your coat," and Gladys wrenched it from her. "And your hat," for the Wainwrights never believed that any one could digest a meal if they sat down to it with their hats on.

"Have a sausage," said Mr. Wainwright shortly.

"I must drink your health," and Ursula nodded to Merton across the table, "even if it is only in a cup of tea. Father and I were so excited when we saw the list in the *Times*. You never told us what a lot of marks you were ahead of everybody, Merton. Georgina Carpenter was at our house, and she told us her brother was saying that to pass first into the Civil Service is about the biggest thing you could have done. The Grammar School boys had a holiday to-day because of you."

"I evidently don't understand about this Civil Service business," Mr. Wainwright observed grimly.

"He is either only a clerk or a servant," chimed in Gladys sharply.

"Oh, you little goose!" exclaimed Ursula, with a laugh. "Don't you know that the Civil Service is the government of the country, and one of the grandest kinds of profession, so that they have the hardest examinations to keep men out of it. It is simply splendid for Merton. Why, he may be a K.C.B. some day," and she smiled at him again across the table.

Mrs. Wainwright gave a sigh of relief.

"That is a load off my mind," she said fervently; "for it seemed a pity for Merton's schooling to come to nothing after all."

"You shouldn't have used such silly words, Merton," remarked Gertrude reprovingly; "it has quite upset papa." The eldest sister attitude asserted itself generally after the first half hour.

"And you will be private secretary to a real cabinet minister?" Ursula asked eagerly. "That would be just the kind of thing you would enjoy."

"Rather!" answered Merton. "I want dreadfully to be Mr. Mandeville's, and I hope I may be."

"And who's he, did you say?" asked Albert Cox. He was a pale, sandy-haired, bilious-look-

ing young man, with a green satin tie, and rather dirty hands; and Merton regarded him with but thinly-disguised scorn.

"The head of my department," he explained haughtily.

"I can't bear offices," remarked Albert again. "It's nothing but clerk's work, and precious little pay. Give me a business, I say. That's where the money's made," and he smiled in a satisfied manner.

"Government offices are different," began Ursula hotly, and then she caught Merton's eye and suddenly laughed. It was delightful to have him back again, and the girl was quick enough in her perceptions to know that he was specially pleased with her. Merton always liked people better when they looked nice, and Ursula, in her simple grey skirt and flannel shirt, had a very dainty appearance just then among the gaudily-attired Wainwrights. Her pale face was slightly flushed with the excitement of seeing Merton, and her little, smooth, dark head ruffled by the unceremonious removal of her hat. Altogether the young man felt he had never seen her to such advantage, and he was very nice to her in consequence.

"I suppose you will live entirely in London

now?" asked Gertrude, trying to look as if she were not holding Albert's hand underneath the tablecloth, and to speak nonchalantly.

"We can pay you visits, and you can show us round," suggested Gladys; "for I suppose you'll be thick with all the nobs up there."

"I hate nobs!" remarked Albert, in his short, jerky way, "they carry such a lot o' side. It don't suit me."

"Why, you're almost a nob yourself, Albert," giggled Gertrude; "you so young and just taken into partnership on your own account."

"Albert seems partial to partnerships," said Gladys, with a wink. And then a merry laugh ran round the festive board, till it came to where Ursula sat, but her face was perfectly solemn. She was one of those people who could never see any joke in the great mystery of falling in love. She was both reverent and serious by nature, and moreover she always saw the deeper thing even in the heart of the most commonplace. Hence it never struck her either to make, or to laugh at, the kind of jokes in which the Wainwright girls delighted.

"Ah, well!" observed Mr. Wainwright more genially under the soothing influence of hot tea and toasted muffins, "young folks will gang their

own gait, I suppose, and we old ones can only look on, seeing they are too wise to be guided by our advice."

"It will be nice for the lad to always mix with gentry," chimed in Mrs. Wainwright, catching with relief her husband's tone. "Not that I care much for the highest gentry myself, but then Merton has always been different."

Yes, Merton had always been different. Ursula thought she had never before realised how different, as she watched his handsome, high-bred face, and saw how unlike his collar and tie were to any that were worn in Winstow. It seems strange that such little things as ties and collars can betoken such enormous social gulfs, but it is so up from the class which is separated from chaos below by the wearing of a collar at all.

"How is Mr. Carpenter?" Merton wanted to know, having always felt a great affection for his old master. Indeed, it was in great measure David's influence that had lifted Merton so far above his people. The grave schoolmaster held out a hand of friendship to the bright, pretty boy, and together they walked through many stages that lay outside the routine of school work. It was he who discovered and fostered Merton's love of literature and art, and as they tramped

together over the country on long summer evenings, or during the holidays, the eager child drank in the stores of knowledge which so few people suspected David of possessing, and concerning which he was usually so strangely silent. And as the boy grew older he, too, would quote reams of poetry and discuss questions of historic interest which his ordinary companions would never have understood. So the friendship grew apace between the ill-matched couple—the man who had failed and the boy who would succeed—and it was a delight to David to note the effect of his influence on Merton's mind and character and manners, for the boy's sake far rather than his own. For David Carpenter was one of the men who are made of unselfish material, and who really care for the ideal of work independently of its effect upon themselves. And he kept his ideal of schoolmastership—the making and moulding of men rather than the forcing of pupils through examinations—deep down out of sight in his heart through years of humble, unrecorded work, with no thought of possible reward except the pure pleasure of seeing that the seed planted so quietly and simply had indeed taken root, and would bear fruit in the lives and thoughts of the men who should come after him.

"I never see Mr. Carpenter now," remarked Gertrude with an attempt at disdain, "I have other fish to fry."

"He is so old and stupid," chimed in Gladys; "but I let him shut my umbrella for me the other day. It had blown inside out, and he was passing. And we often flirt a bit on his way to and from school. It keeps my hand in when the younger chaps are busy."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Merton, shrugging his shoulders. "As if a man like that would want to flirt with you!" he added with brotherly candor.

"Mr. Carpenter would never want to flirt with any one, I am sure," argued Ursula.

"I suppose you often see him?" queried Gladys, with a flash of temper in the insinuation.

"No, hardly ever," replied Ursula simply. "But I see Georgina continually. She is very kind to us."

"So I have heard," continued the young lady disagreeably; but then Merton spoke.

"If you have quite finished tea, mother, may we go? I want to unpack one or two things for you and father and the girls, and then I will walk home with Ursula and look up Mr. Grey."

"Do, my dear. It is something like home to have you back again, my boy. And to hear you speak so polite to your poor mother is a refreshing sound."

Merton laughed, and put his arm round her ample waist as they all went out into the hall.

"A fellow who's rude to his mother deserves to be kicked."

"Ah, but, my dear, there are many as are when they rise up in the world as you are doing, and the old folks have to stay behind in the humble homes."

"Then they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Why, I could never forget that you are my mother whatever big place I might win. I couldn't be such a cad."

"You are a dear lad," and Mrs. Wainwright wiped a tear from her eyes as she followed Merton up to his room, the floor of which was littered with luggage, "and when I thank God for making my boy a gentleman I never forget to add a prayer that he may not grow too grand to love his mother."

Merton laid his cheek against hers.

"You need not be afraid, mother dear, for the more of a gentleman I am the less fear there is of my ever outgrowing my care for you. I am

sorry you and father did not quite understand about my success, but I forgot every one would not know what a big thing it is to pass first into the Civil Service."

"I am stupid, I know, but I am very jealous for you, my dear."

"Well, I have got a bigger prize than I ever expected," Merton assured her; "and Ursula was right, I may be a K.C.B. some day. How do you think Sir Merton Wainwright would sound, mother?"

"Something beautiful, dear lad. God bless you, and make you a good man even if you should be so lifted into the highest circles. And now, my dear, I must be going downstairs. Papa will wonder where I am, and he must not feel neglected because you have come home. It might lead to a little unpleasantness."

"I say, mother," and Merton looked up from his portmanteau and caught hold of her dress, "what about that young bounder who was at tea?"

"Oh, my dear! don't speak like that. Papa has taken him into partnership now you do not want the place. And he and Gertrude have been carrying on a bit lately, and in my opinion he means business. It would be a fine settling

for Gerty, not being so young as she once was, and a bit stout, which is natural considering me, but it holds out no hopes that she will grow any thinner."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed her son.

"Do not use bad language, my dear. And you must remember that Gerty would not be to the taste of some of your fine friends; and with Gladys coming on now so fast it would be a comfort to have one of them settled with a home of her own. And if she fancies Albert, there is no need for us to give a contrary opinion. Be a good boy, Merton, and don't say anything hurtful to your sister's feelings—just to please me," she coaxed.

"All right, mother. Only the thought of such a brother-in-law as that is rather a knock-down."

"Well, dear, it won't matter to you up in London, and he is a very worthy young man."

"That is a good thing considering his tie," observed Merton resignedly. "I shall be down directly. Don't let Ursula go."

"Very well. And you won't speak of Albert again as 'a bumper' before your sister, will you, dear?"

"All right; only you mean bounder."

"Well, my love, it is all the same, and would

be very hurtful to Gerty's feelings," and she bustled away.

Meanwhile the elder Miss Wainwright had dragged Ursula off for a quiet confidence. Ursula was surprised as she and Gertrude had never been special friends, and she was impatient for a talk with Merton. But she had not lived nearly twenty years for other people without learning much of the spirit of sympathy, so she was quite ready to enter into whatever Gertrude had to tell.

"Oh, Ursula!" began that young lady with crimson cheeks and rather a nervous little laugh, "I suppose you have guessed?"

"What?" For Ursula was still at sea. Of course she had noticed young Cox's friendship with the Wainwrights, but she had always lived in a masculine atmosphere, and so was never on the lookout for incipient love affairs, where they might exist, any more than where they might not.

"Why, about me and Albert. It was only yesterday he really popped the question, though we have been carrying on ever since he came."

"Do you mean that you are going to marry Mr. Cox?" asked Ursula slowly. The idea of any one's being willing to marry Albert Cox was a difficult one for her to grasp.

"Well, what else should I mean, I'd like to know?" exclaimed the bride elect somewhat snappishly.

Ursula looked at her curiously.

"Are you in love with him?" she asked.

"Aren't I just!" and Gertrude blushed. "Why, he's a regular honey, is Albert!"

Her friend drew nearer. She was so quick to see when things were real, and there was a look in Gertrude's eyes that only reality could have lighted.

"What does it feel like, Gertrude? Do tell me."

"Oh, I can't exactly say. All hot and shivery somehow. And you know how I relish my food as a rule, Ursula? Well, I haven't been able hardly to swallow solids since Albert came up to the scratch. I've never refused sausages in my life before, but I couldn't have fancied one to-night."

Ursula had never been so near a love story before. She had read of such things, and dreamed of them, too, in some bright realm of future experience; but her ideas on the subject were all indistinct and floating in a golden haze. The sudden focussing of these far-off rays of light into such a very commonplace romance filled her with

a strange, sad wonder. She knew quite well how utterly impossible a man Albert Cox was, and she saw all the vulgarities of Gertrude Wainwright; but she also felt that this love that had touched them was something outside their sordid selves, and yet was too beautiful a thing for such as they even to handle. Love stories seemed to her to belong to a race of fair ladies and noble knights, and to be spoiled and tarnished by the touch of such common hands. She was too young then to know that God's best gifts, such as light and beauty and friendship and love are within the reach of all those who have eyes to see and hands to grasp them. That no room is too poorly furnished for the sunlight to be admitted, no life too commonplace for love to be let in. In youth's ignorance she shrank from the fact that so precious a jewel should be enshrined in such a cheap casket, instead of seeing how blessed a thing it is that poor ordinary lives, which have no beauty of their own, can still be enriched by the heavenly colouring of the gift of love.

"I suppose being in love makes people seem quite different?" queried Ursula meditatively. She was trying to reconcile Albert's romance with Albert's self. But Gertrude was growing impatient of these introspective suggestions in-

stead of the hearty congratulations she felt were her due.

"No, it doesn't," she answered sharply. "Any one can see what Albert is, and what a fortunate girl I am to have taken his fancy. There isn't a girl I know in Winstow who wouldn't be glad to be making such a comfortable marriage. 'Different,' indeed! I don't know what you are talking about."

Ursula came back to the practical with a start.

"It was only that I was trying to understand it all, Gertrude, because it seems to me so wonderfully interesting that you and Mr. Cox should feel like that. I do congratulate you, dear, and hope you will be very happy."

Miss Wainwright acknowledged the good wishes by a somewhat noisy embrace.

"We had our first kiss under the mistletoe last Christmas," she announced in a burst of confidence.

"But Mr. Cox had only just come then!" exclaimed Ursula.

"Well, and what of that? It was only a mistletoe kiss, you know, and a bit of a lark and all that. You are such a prude, Ursula, with that pale, grave face of yours and dressed in such

dowdy colours as you generally choose. I don't wonder the men aren't after you; but never mind, you can't help it."

"I don't mind," replied Ursula fervently, as the idea of such attentions as Albert Cox's made her hot all over.

"We are to be married this summer," giggled Gertrude. "Oh, I can hardly believe it! It seems too good to be true. Think of it, Ursula! The trousseau, and furnishing the house, and all that! My head's in a perfect whirl."

"I shouldn't have thought that you would have had time to think about such details as clothes and furniture yet?" and Ursula's face looked puzzled.

"Details!" exclaimed her friend. "That is you all over. Why, I was imagining the drawing-room carpet while we were at tea. Don't you think crimson looks good and cheerful, and handsome rep curtains to match? But then, again, crimson is best for the chairs, because of setting off the antimacassars—those white crochet ones, you know—and the carpet ought to be a contrast."

"When did you begin to like Mr. Cox?" asked Ursula suddenly, "that is, if you don't mind telling me? Of course, I don't want to seem curious,

but it interests me so very much. I never talked to any one who was in love before."

"Oh, la! I don't mind. Indeed it's nice to have you to talk to, Ursula. You're always a good little thing. Well, it must have been soon after he came. He always has such a way with him, has Albert; only I couldn't be sure you see, that he meant anything more than just 'a kiss and never tell,'" and Gertrude laughed half-shyly.

"But—I don't understand," gasped Ursula.

"You're such an innocent, my dear! Well, then, we got walking out together more and more, and—and it's no use disguising the matter any longer, I should have died if he had not meant it!"

Ursula's quick ear caught the note of reality which rang sharp and clear in the last few words.

"I am so glad," she said softly, "that it came all right."

"It's an awful strain, Ursula," Gertrude continued, her eyes full of tears, "wondering and hoping, and having to keep it all to yourself. If anything would have made me thin I am sure that would. I got such a sick feeling inside when he carried on a bit with the Holt girls, or even once when he said your eyes were scorch-

ers. And all the sympathy I got from Gladys was her telling me how forward I was," and Gertrude sobbed into her pocket-handkerchief.

"Never mind, dear," said Ursula, taking her hand; "all that is over now, and I hope you will be very happy."

"It has come with a rush at the end," explained the weeping Miss Wainwright, thickly; "and upset me altogether. But it seems silly, don't it? to cry over getting the very thing in the world you want."

"It isn't silly," exclaimed Ursula quickly, feeling somehow that it was far nearer to what should be than the discussion of the drawing-room carpet. "Caring so much about anything, in a happy as well as a sad way, would be sure to make one cry."

"What a comfort you are," and Gertrude dried her tears. "He's going to buy me a ring to-morrow. He asked me what was my favourite stone, and when I said garnets he actually said that a ruby wouldn't be too good for me, and he could fork out quite easily to that tune. He's that well off now, you know, Ursula, that it'll all be quite pleasant with papa. It seems so providential that he was taken into partnership first, doesn't it?"

"I expect it was."

"Well, hardly that! Only it does seem so," replied Gertrude, whose creed that Providence was only concerned in killing people, was simple, and not perhaps wholly uncommon.

"I once thought," she began again after a few moments silence, "that I could have fancied David Carpenter, but it was nonsense—I couldn't."

"But did he ever want you to?" Ursula asked in amazement.

"You are simple!" exclaimed her friend; "as if a girl couldn't see what nobody else does." Which was perfectly true in this case, even including David himself.

"Oh! there is Merton calling for you. How tiresome of him, just when I wanted you to talk it all over with. Gladys is not very pleasant about it—jealous of course—and keeps making rude remarks about girls being not so young as they once were, but I'm much better looking," and her ruffled countenance assumed a sudden smile. "Albert says so."

But it was delightful to Ursula to escape, and she loved walking home through the keen, clear starlight, with her old friend, Merton, who was yet growing into something newer and better, too.

L. of C.

"Tell me all about it," she said simply; and the young man, being one who always wanted a listener, poured forth into her sympathetic ears the tangled story of work and play, of ambitions and successes, which no one could understand quite so well as she. Her eyes shone, and the sharp air painted a little flush upon her cheek, for as yet it seemed to the girl the best thing in the world to listen to Merton's talk about himself. She did not know that there is a happier stage beyond this when a man will only talk to a woman about herself, because his own things seem so dull and empty without her touch upon them, and are only interesting to him when they belong also to her.

"I have always wanted to go into the Civil Service, you know, Ursula, and it is so jolly to get what you want, isn't it?"

"It must be perfectly lovely."

"It is, though it seems silly to say so. Only of course it is different with you. There is such a lot I want to say, and yet can only say to you—because you see, the mater and the girls couldn't possibly enter into it, and one can't talk like that to other fellows. They would only laugh."

"I know," and Ursula nodded her head wisely.

"You see, all my friends up there are gentlemen by birth, so they can't quite realise what all this means to me."

"And you are a gentleman, too, Merton," exclaimed his friend, loyally, "you know you are."

"Not quite the same as some of them. But I mean to be a gentleman nevertheless," and the young man threw back his head proudly. "And not stop getting on either. Work is always easy to me, you know."

"Do you remember how easily you used to win the prizes at school?" and Ursula's eyes were rather dreamy.

"Well, it has always been the same. Don't repeat what I say—it sounds like side, and I don't mean it to be—but I can always succeed in things. I saw when I went up to Oxford that it would be a pull to play cricket and do athletics, more even than to take a good degree, though of course I always meant that, too. And you know what a good all-round man I became, and how I got into a better set than just a grammar school scholar ever would have done."

"You are splendid, Merton, and you always have been. I know you will be a great man some day."

"I don't know about that," he exclaimed, pleas-

antly; but then his tone waxed more confidential, "but I mean to try, and to get into society, and all that, Ursula, too. It's a ripping feeling to know you've got life before you, and such big prizes to win, and people are so jolly to me everywhere. Do you know I danced with an earl's daughter at one of the Commem. balls. Of course I wouldn't tell any one but you, it sounds so snobbish."

"But you know I understand that it isn't really," she interrupted eagerly—almost too eagerly for a perfect belief—"It is just as an indicator of the heights you are climbing up to already, not a crowning fact of itself."

"Yes, that's it. How awfully well you put things, Ursula." For Merton had felt a flush of shame even in the dark at the thought that he was bragging.

"It seems somehow a mistake," continued the girl, "that you are not the heir to some great family. I always used to make up stories about you, Merton, in which you were a prince in disguise."

"Of course I wish," and the young man's voice rang rather plaintively, "that my people were like yours have always been, gentlefolks from ever so long ago, and with a crest and all that

kind of thing. I am afraid I envy you, Ursula, your well-bred ancestors."

"And I envy you, Merton," she interrupted, quickly, "for all your brilliance and cleverness and popularity. You must remember," and her voice thrilled with a feeling of unspoken sympathy, "that it may be a greater thing to found a family than to end one. I think my childish fancy is a prophecy too; perhaps you are a prince in disguise after all, and the time is coming when you shall find and enter into your kingdom."

Merton smiled, and his smile was a very sunshiny one.

"You are awfully nice to me," he said, simply, "and you always understand what I mean, even when I can't quite explain it. How is it?"

"I think," with a thoughtful look, "that it is never difficult to understand, if only we put ourselves in the other person's place. I have often had to do that kind of thing, you know, so, I suppose, it comes easily to me. But with you, Merton, it is different. It is my favourite place to stand up by you, and then I can't help seeing all your view, too."

"Well, I am very glad you are here. I simply

couldn't imagine a home-coming without you. Of course, I am awfully fond of the mater—a fellow always is of his mother, because there is something bigger in it than just her goodness to him; but, I say, Ursula, I can't help it, but do you think it is caddish of me not to ever want Gertrude and Gladys to come to London, to say nothing of that horror of a Cox? I should hate to turn out a snob, because, of course, I know I have risen, and all that; but I should be rather sick if I had to show up the girls to some of my friends. This is in deadly confidence, you know."

Ursula's voice was very gentle.

"I don't think Gertrude will want to come to London . now she is engaged," she suggested, soothingly.

"You don't think it horrid of me to say this?" earnestly. "I couldn't to any one but you. Only somehow things looked worse to-night than whenever I have come home before. And you seemed so different, Ursula, and—and I wished you were my sister instead."

And in those days Ursula flushed with pleasure at such a compliment.

"I liked your clothes awfully, too. Lots of the men's sisters wore shirts like yours."

"I made this myself," Ursula confided in him, "and it was quite cheap grey flannel."

"Oh, but that doesn't matter a bit, if things look right. And you had such a nice grey satin ribbon round your waist. That wasn't quite cheap?" And he laughed teasingly.

"No, that was an extravagance," Ursula admitted, "in honour of your coming home. I saved it out of my breakfast, because I haven't been very hungry lately, and father did not come down; so very little did for me."

"I used to save out of my meals," agreed Merton, not knowing that while his economies were in luxuries Ursula's were in necessities. "It is rather a good plan."

"It is, indeed—if you like my ribbon," she added, with a laugh.

"Of course, I could never hide that she was my sister?" remarked Merton, after a moment's silence, and in a faintly questioning tone.

"Of course not," echoed Ursula quickly, and he knew that she was right.

"But I needn't have much to do with that Cox creature, need I?" he pleaded.

"I wouldn't even think of him," laughed Ursula, and Merton joined in the laugh with a lightheartedness that showed he had for the moment

put the unpleasant thought entirely out of sight. Which was one of Merton's powers, and one which in after days made him a happier if not a finer man. He always could shut his eyes where he would, and he never liked to look at what was ugly and unattractive, however plainly it was stamped on the world about him, and even when it was written on the face of a friend. But Ursula was not made that way. She saw straight through the scarred surface into the heart of the need beneath, and, seeing, sympathised, and, looking deeper, learned to love.

"I am glad Mr. Carpenter is pleased," continued Merton, "he has always been so jolly to me, and I owe him such a lot."

"When Mr. Carpenter smiles about anything it always reminds me of a frozen pool's suddenly melting and the sun's shining warm into it. Do you know what I mean?"

"Oh! I never thought about it. Did you tell him, Ursula?"

"Yes—in spite of Georgina," she added, with a laugh.

"She's an old cat!" he exclaimed. "And what did he say?"

"That you were a good boy, or something to that effect."

"How like him! Do you know, Ursula, I believe I care more about his praise than anybody's in the whole world. It makes me feel somehow such a little chap again. And I am proud of myself in a humble sort of way."

"I know."

"And I can't get rid of his influence, either. Do you know, once up at Oxford, some men were talking about the schools they'd been at, and sneering at fellows who hadn't been at one of the public schools, and I was rather pretending I had been at one too, which was beastly of me, I know, only it is frightfully difficult not to mind about some things; when suddenly I remembered Carpenter, and what he would have said, and I spoke up straight out, and told them I had only been at Winstow Grammar School, so I was rather out of their talk, and—and you don't know how hard it was. But I couldn't be ashamed then of the school where he had done all that for me."

"It was splendid of you, Merton," and Ursula's eyes shone.

"Of course it wasn't. Only it saved me from being a cad, you see."

"You could never be that, Merton."

The young man shook his head. "I know

myself better than you do, Ursula, and it would be very easy to me to catch on to the new things and forget the old."

A sudden pain leapt at the girl's heart—a dread that Merton might one day outgrow the memories of Winstow and the friendships which had sprung from childhood there. But then she looked up into his handsome, open face, and felt that her fear was a disloyal one.

"You will find your kingdom some day, Merton," she said earnestly, "but you will always remember that it was at Winstow that some of us first found out that you were a prince."

"Yes, I will," he promised. And they went into the house quite content.

Mr. Grey was very glad to see Merton again, and made him warmly welcome. He was always interested to hear of that Oxford world where his father had been in the good old days when the Greys held their heads up in the world, and lived according to their deserts. It was such a pleasure to Mr. Grey to go over their family history, and to grumble at the fate which denied him the privileges of his forefathers. But a country clergyman of fifty years before could only endow his sons with a professional education, and leave them with that to fight their own

way in the world. Two of them, who were soldiers, had fought their way out of it; another, who had taken Orders, died during a time of special stress and strain in the black heart of East London, and Arthur, the youngest, who was a lawyer, was left as the sole representative of that branch of the family of Grey.

Though their home was poor and shabby, and its table most inadequately spread, there was always a refinement about it that appealed to Merton's fastidious taste. He felt much more at home there than he ever did in his father's house behind the shop, and he never failed to give to Mr. Grey that deferential respectful courtesy which made the young man so popular also with men much older than himself.

As he sat smoking in the small library, which was the Greys' only attempt at a sitting-room, he forgot to be irritated with the man's querulous complaints because of the purity of his pronunciation, and he looked with real admiration and affection on the picture of Ursula knitting in the firelight, with a glad smile of sympathetic interest driving all the sadness out of her beautiful eyes. And it was only after he had gone away back to London, robbing her world of his absorbing personality, that Ursula remembered

she had never even told him about the prospect of her own immediate work, or the far-off castle, of which Georgina Carpenter had laid the foundation-stone, that she might one day also follow him to London.

CHAPTER V

RENNEL HILL

GEORGINA CARPENTER was true to her word and promise to arrange for Ursula's engagement as governess at Rennel Hill.

Old Mrs. Lyall was somewhat overpowered by the charge of the two sturdy grandchildren whom her son in India had handed over to her, but she was delighted to feel in them a legitimate excuse for abandoning her small London home, and coming to live in the country where she had been born such long years ago.

As you climb up the steep, white road from Winstow, with the valley of the river on your left, and the far stretch of channel and country beyond it on your right, you pass through village and hamlet where creeper-covered cottages cluster, and an old grey church marks out the confines of a new parish. But the road winds on, with a promise at each corner of some wider stretch of far-away beauty, and a fresh whiff of the cool, sweet air that blows over the moors. Long narrow lanes strike off from the main way

here and there, and dive down into the rich valleys which reach to the water's edge, but the road itself makes great bounds uphill until it brings you to the Chase, where the tangled wildness of Scotland seems to have been caught up and transplanted into this warm western country, and on the border of which stands the old sunny house which goes by the name of Rennel Hill. Almost hidden by its shelter of stately trees, it turns its back on the high road, and looks towards the south, catching through an open glade that far-off silver streak beyond the view which shows how near the sea-line really is. A low stone wall at the end of the broad path, which runs round the house, makes a balcony from which to watch the river six hundred feet below—to hear the murmur of its waters, and to look far down at its winding way through the encircling hills. The old lady herself, with her sweet, tranquil face and snow-white hair, added to the beauty of the picture, Ursula thought, as she came to greet her with that old-world courtesy which gets so crowded out of modern manners, and hangs only like some faint scent of dried rose leaves and lavender about the dear, dainty old-ladyhood which is now so rarely to be found.

"Welcome to Rennel Hill, my child," said Mrs. Lyall in her soft, musical voice, as she held out hands of greeting.

A lump rose in Ursula's throat, and her eyes filled with foolish tears.

"You are such a little girl to have to work," continued the old lady, "and such as you ought to have only time for play. I am so sorry when life is hard on the children."

"But I am quite grown up, you know," explained Ursula with a quiver in her voice.

Mrs. Lyall smiled. "Not quite," she said gently. "I don't think that even I am quite grown up yet, nor ever shall be this side the grave. We mortals cry and fret and question as children even to the end, but our Father is very patient, and He knows we shall be wiser one day, dear."

"It is very good of you to have me," said the girl, glancing at Mrs. Lyall's sweet face, with that wistful look of hers which always won for Ursula her friends. "I am not clever enough for a good governess, I am afraid."

"Never mind about that. I cannot think of you as anything but a child yourself, for I remember what a long way off it was when I stood, as you do now, on the threshold of the

years, and looked with wondering eyes into the misty distance. And how happy and ignorant I was—almost as much so as my little grandchildren are now. And I think, dear, that I would rather you were happy and ignorant too."

"But don't you want me to teach, Mrs. Lyall?"

"Yes, my child. But in the simple, unconscious way of being what a girl should be; not by filling your poor little head with hard, dry facts instead of the sweet girlish fancies that ought to be there."

"You must tell me what you want me to do," said Ursula earnestly. "Already I want to please you more than by just doing the work I am paid for."

The old lady took Ursula's hand and linked it in her arm, and together they strolled through the quaint, sun-filled flower garden, bounded by its lichen-covered wall, the door of which opened out right into the tangle of the wildest part of the Chase.

"I want you, dear, to come near to my grandchildren in that child spirit which never dies or grows old in those who enter the kingdom of heaven as little children—to play with them and work with them as a friend; a little wiser friend,

perhaps, but in no far-away grown-upness which shall shut you out from their everyday life and interests. I am too old to be much to these dear babies," and a sad smile flickered over the withered face, "and their young mother is far away. But I want them to learn how sweet a thing is the young mother heart, which is wrapped up in all true womanhood, and if you teach them that, Ursula—you must forgive my calling you by what is one of my favourite names—you will have fulfilled my ideal of what your work may be."

"I will try, Mrs. Lyall," and the girl looked up with shining eyes. "It makes it all seem so different now you have shown me the ideal."

"Ah, my child! It is just that which makes the world seem so different. Never lose sight of the Ideal, for it is that which brings out all the latent beauty of life."

"My life has been so full of duty," said Ursula in a quickened confidence, "that I am afraid I have never seen much beyond it."

"Poor child! I understand. Mr. Carpenter told me how brave you are and how hard sometimes is your lot."

"Mr. Carpenter!" exclaimed Ursula. "Don't you mean Georgina?"

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Lyall with a smile at the recollection of the two accounts of Ursula which she had received from Georgina and Georgina's brother. "It was Mr. Carpenter who told me most about you."

"He doesn't know much about me," argued Ursula; "though of course he has known me slightly for a long time."

"It was what he told me that made me want to have you, Ursula. Ah! that is so like you young people; you little know what friends you have, for the need, which brings out true friendship, does not often come with youth. Would to God that it never did."

Ursula was silent. She wondered whatever David could have had to say about her, and she wondered still more that he ever found tongue to say it. But it was kind of him, and she was glad.

"Here are the children," said their grandmother as two little figures in holland pinafores came rushing out of the house. Such a merry, rosy couple with round curly heads and bright brown eyes. Ursula could hardly distinguish between their faces, for they had the same neat, tight little mouths, and the same dimples in their sun-browned cheeks, though one of them was a couple of sizes larger than the other.

"This is Dick," exclaimed his grandmother, indicating the taller, "and we call his little sister Dubby."

"They both look like boys," exclaimed Ursula in astonishment.

"Dick is a real boy, and I are only a p'etending one," remarked Dubby solemnly; "but we'll both be soldiers when we're kite growed up."

"You won't," argued her brother from the pinnacle of just seven years, for Dubby was barely five.

"I will, I will, I will! I feel I will," screamed the little girl in sudden and impotent indignation. "You promised yesterday I should when we builded the castle," and she looked up eagerly at her brother.

"Do not tease your little sister," said Mrs. Lyall, laying her hand on his rough head; for you must not forget that boys are strong, and should protect the weak. You must be brave and chivalrous towards all women, Dick, remembering that they are weak while you are strong."

"You wouldn't call nurse weak if you heard her pull up the blinds," argued the child in defence of his position.

"Nurse is stronger than a elephant," chimed

in his little sister, who never failed in loyal partizanship; "she's enough strong to break the combs when our heads is washed."

"What dears they are!" exclaimed Ursula. "I have never had anything to do with children before, but I know I shall love it. It will be more like play than work, Mrs. Lyall."

"I wish it to be so, my dear. Perhaps as much for your sake, since I have seen you, as for theirs. I do not like young faces to look so white and sad as yours, Ursula; and the children, I hope, may give you back some of that sunshine which ought to have come to you through the nursery window of your own childhood."

"I never had a nursery, that I can remember," said the girl simply; "for I have always had so much work to do."

"Too much, my child, I fear. And it has made you wise beyond your years. But when God wants our time for His purpose, we know that He will give back to us some day all that we have missed thereby of joy and gladness a thousandfold."

"I am not wise," and the girl's voice rang sadly. "I have never had a mother to teach me how to be. And I always feel when things go wrong and I am impatient, how

different it would have been if only she had been here."

"You make a mistake in saying you have no mother to teach you, Ursula. Do you think that the fuller love of the life of love across the grave is cramped and shortened, so that it cannot help and influence its dear ones? Do you imagine that the fragment of the eternal, which comes to leaven the lump of our everyday lives here, is less than the whole yonder? No, my dear; believe me, the veil is thinner than we think, and the heart clasp of those who love us deeper than the physical handshake. Even here, you know, it is so."

"Are you going to play with us?" demanded Dick, suddenly abandoning the attempt to drive an excitable hen into the path along which it should have walked to its coop.

"Me, too," pleaded Dubby. "And don't play games what's too growed-up for me, like grannie and Dick does with the cards." And her round face became puckered with anxiety.

"Yes, go with the children now," said Mrs. Lyall, "and they will show you the garden and all their treasures, and the little room over the front door which is to belong to you three for your very own. And remember, Ursula, that

you and the children have much to learn from each other." And she shook her head at the contrast between the two fat, chubby faces and the slender girl's pale one. "We are apt to think that because we grow older we know more; and so it should be. But we have much to learn from the next generation, as well as much to teach it. We must bear that in mind. But I will not keep you now. Good-bye till one o'clock." And the old lady went off on her gardening business, with her basket over her arm and the large scissors in her gauntlet-gloved hand.

Ursula looked after her with a reverent admiration. She had never seen any one so gracious and yet so grandly gentle as Mrs. Lyall. Her tall, stately figure looked graceful in a garden shawl, and her well-set head carried the large, mushroom-shaped hat as it would, and had, a diamond tiara at a court ball.

"Grannie does rather long talks," explained Dick, hanging on to Ursula's arm; "but we have to listen 'cause of politeness."

"I don't like politeness," Dubby chimed in; "and I thought p'r'aps it wouldn't matter at Winstow same as it did in Inja and in the ship. On'y it does—worser," she added emphatically.

"Oh, it always matters," interposed Ursula hastily.

"There!" exclaimed Dick triumphantly. "I told you so!"

"Let's pretend," began Dubby thoughtfully, "that we is a werry unpolite family, what lives in an unpolite place."

"No," contradicted Dick; "let's pretend we're going to shoot tigers in the jungle. Through that door is a lovely jungle, you know."

"But I want to see the garden first," said Ursula.

"I'se got a garden," and Dubby nodded her round little head wisely; "on'y my fings don't grow quick enough, though I dig them up nearly every day."

"That's the worst of gardens," chimed in Dick; "it's almost all waiting. It took years and years to grow my mustard and cress letters, and we eat them in a minute."

"They tasted rather much of grit, too," observed his little sister. "I bited it, and it cracked."

"What a dear little wood!" exclaimed Ursula, for the lawn seemed to overflow into woods all the way round, and the bright daffodils waved

their heads as the soft wind passed over them, which was bringing spring up from the mellow west.

"We're forbid to walk on that wall what looks down to the river," and Dubby regarded the balcony wistfully.

"There's no danger, really," argued Dick; "only, you see, I'm a soldier, and soldiers have to be extra obedient. Daddy told me so."

"The fog all goes rolling about down there in lumps some mornings," the little girl explained poetically. "It looks like grannie's bed afore it's made."

"I hope you'll teach me into a clever man frightful quick," said Dick suddenly, "'cause my daddy has to be in India without me, and I 'spect he wants me to help him a good lot. So I must make haster than most boys."

"My mummy's frock always sounded like when I kick in the leaves," and Dubby plunged knee-deep into a dried heap of the autumn before that had never been cleared away, "or else it was her petticoat. I forget. Inja's such a long way, and we was years coming over the sea to grannie's house."

"This is my garden," observed Dick gravely; "it isn't looking very well to-day. Sometimes I

think I water it a little too much, only it does make the soil neater, doesn't it?"

"I think it's drownded," remarked Dubby cheerfully.

"It is a little wet," said Ursula, regarding the sloppy patch with interest.

"Too wet!" And Dick shook his head.

"Let's pretend it's the rains breaking," suggested Dubby.

"I don't think it'll ever be dry again," in still more mournful tones, for Dick was a boy who never shirked consequences or shrank from facing difficulty and danger.

"Oh, yes, it will," Ursula assured him. "The sun is coming soon through that soft, thin cloud, and it will be warm directly."

"Do you know," and Dick looked up at her confidingly, "I am so glad you have come to play with me, 'cause, you see, Dubby is rather little for being only a girl."

"I aren't rather little!" exclaimed the child with a sudden burst of fury, "I aren't, I aren't, I aren't, I feel I aren't." Which was Dubby's conclusive method of expression when crossed in temper.

Ursula felt rather helpless, and moreover in-

clined to laugh; but the stern little face brought her to her senses.

"I feel I aren't," she repeated in shrill tones.

"Oh, no; you are very big for your age," Ursula hastened to assure her.

"The biggest there is," agreed Dubby in a mollified voice.

"I suppose you are going to be a soldier?" Ursula asked Dick, as they wandered together down the sloping fields.

"I am a soldier," he replied with dignity, "and of course when a boy begins to be a thing he isn't very likely to leave off when he grows up."

"Of course not," agreed Ursula. There was something very sweet and soothing in the sunny atmosphere of this spring garden—something restfully amusing in the children's quaint chatter—and an overshadowing influence of higher thoughts and aspirations from the gracious lady whose home it was. Ursula's sensitive nature responded to it all. She was always so quick to catch the tone of surroundings that played upon her deeper feelings. It suddenly seemed as if she had stepped into a story book, and left the hard home life down in Winstow far behind; and yet it was only a few hours before that she

had sat at breakfast sympathising with her father in his description of his recent attack of insomnia, and listening to his complaints at the inconvenience her daily absence from home up at Rennel Hill was likely to occasion him.

"I are goin' to be a soldier too," remarked Dubby, "'cause grannie telled us 'bout a lady soldier what was called Noah's Ark."

"'Twasn't Noah," corrected her brother; "it was Joanuff."

"An' she fighted bettern all the men," continued the child.

"No, she didn't," argued Dick; "she only fought bettern all the women."

"She did!" and Dubby stamped her fat foot. "Grannie knowed her quite well, and she did."

"But she died before your grandmother was born," explained Ursula.

Dick held his head on one side like a sharp little bird.

"I shouldn't have thought any one could have died before grannie was born," he said thoughtfully.

"She fighted much braver than the men," repeated Dubby. "Grannie telled me so. I shall be 'zackly like her when I'm a lady."

"I will read you a long story about her some

day," Ursula promised, "and about lots of other brave people."

"Not difficult words?" begged Dubby. "Grannie's stories have such lots of difficult words."

"'Specially her Sunday ones," chimed in Dick.

"Grannie thinks a great lot on Sundays," continued the little girl, "gener'ly with her eyes shut. I don't like Sundays."

"Why not?" Ursula wanted to know.

"'Cause my clothes is clean and tighter, and church is werry long."

"I don't like the silentness worse than the longness," Dick explained, "'cause I think of such 'portant things to say, and grannie won't allow even tiny whispers."

"I went with my nurse to her Sunday chapel," said Dubby, "and she whispered a lot to Clay."

"He's daddy's old groom," interposed Dick.

"It wasn't half so strict as grannie's church, and there was windows to see through, and no boys in nightgowns."

Ursula leaned against the gate, and looked at her two small charges half dreamily. She knew now what they reminded her of—two very eager, alert little robins, who seemed as if they would never grow tired of hopping about. They had

faces like robins, with the same bright twinkling eyes and the same brown-red colouring and sharp features.

"It's my birfday in two weeks," remarked Dubby between her efforts to climb up on to the gate. "I shall have a cake with candles on it, as many as how old I am."

"I never had a cake with candles on my birthday," said Ursula.

"I 'spect there wouldn't be an enough big cake for all the candles how old you are," and Dubby shook her curly head.

"I've been thinking," said Dick suddenly "that very old people aren't quite so pretty. In course I don't mean people who are old like you and grannie, but heaps and heaps older."

"Who are you thinking of?" Ursula wanted to know.

"The old woman that sells oranges outside the station. I bought one off her the last time Clay drove me down, and she gave me another. It was a bit squashy at one end, but it was very kind of her, wasn't it? And I thought her face seemed a little too wrinkledly, and rather dirty, too."

"Nurse says we're dirty," exclaimed Dubby.

"Never mind," said Ursula; "I was a dirty little girl once, I expect."

"And it came off all right when you growed up?" and Dubby's spirits rose again.

"She is not at all pretty, I agree with you," said Ursula to Dick; "but then she is very, very old."

"A good bit oldern you?" queried Dubby.

"Oh, yes. Why, how old do you think I am?"

The children both regarded her with their birdlike heads on one side.

"I guess ninety," said Dubby at length.

"Thirteen?" was Dick's conclusion.

"Both wrong," laughed the girl. "I am three times as old as Dick, and when he knows his multiplication table, he will know what that is."

"I'm seven," and the boy looked thoughtful. "I say," with a sudden inspiration, "let's go into the schoolroom and learn multiplication."

Ursula thought it a good idea, and they turned back towards the house.

"But your face isn't a bit like the orange-woman's," said Dubby kindly. "I think you and Clay has the kindest, prettiest faces I know."

"Clay's father hasn't at all a pretty face," and Dick shook his head.

"An' he growls," piped in Dubby, "with a great big, deep growling voice what sounds like a wolf."

"On Christmas we gave him a shilling," said Dick.

"An' he spat for gladness," explained his little sister.

"Which is a thing nurse never would have allowed."

"Clay's cheeks is pinker than yours," continued Dubby, "but you have a werry jolly face," and Ursula laughed at the child's compliment and the remembrance of the pale, pensive reflection she was wont to see in her looking-glass.

"Mr. Carpenter has a very kind face," observed Dick, "and a nice smile."

"Do you know him?" asked Ursula with surprise.

"Oh! yes," said Dick. "I went with grannie to see him, and Miss Carpenter, and he took me into the garden, and called me 'old man,' and was frightfully jolly. He's the nicest man I know, 'cept daddy in India."

All boys made friends with David Carpenter. Perhaps because he treated them as reasonable beings, and took for granted that they were, in their way, as worthy of consideration and respect

as he was himself. He would speak to the smallest grammar-school boy exactly as he would to the biggest university scholar; and Merton Wainwright, in the flush of his first class and Civil Service victory, felt almost a little boy again as he heard his old master's short, sincere words of praise, just as when he had won a prize in his boyhood's days. They had made him feel a successful man already.

The days at Rennel Hill were all very much alike. Ursula grew very fond of the children, and fulfilled Mrs. Lyall's idea, of being friends with them, rather, perhaps, than instructor. She tried to do her duty, but that wonderful gift of imparting possessed knowledge, which makes a successful teacher, was not hers. She had indeed that child spirit, deep down underneath all the burdens with which life had well-nigh crushed it out, which is at home among children, and knows by instinct exactly how to talk and joke and play with them; and she had, too, a tender strain, full-grown before its time, for those who, like herself, were weak and helpless and dependent, whether because of their babyhood, or the overpowering circumstances of later life. But of the orthodox governess nature Ursula had none. It was fortunate for her that Mrs. Lyall loved

and lived in the ideal, and so was content with the sweet picture of the girl sitting in the garden with the children climbing round her, listening to the quaint allegory, or fantastic hero-story, which was Ursula's natural way of teaching morals or telling history. But far more than her time with the children Ursula loved the long talks which the old lady had with her when pacing the garden, or snipping the rose-trees, or gathering the flowers—all of which were such important items in the day's work at Rennel Hill. She drank in with eager interest the old-world stories that Mrs. Lyall had to tell of a girlhood long gone by; of great people whom old Sir Robert Wakenham knew and introduced to his daughters in the diplomatic circles in which their lot was cast; of many a romance, touched with the tender hand of memory, and many a tragedy buried beneath a bitter smile and a silent tongue, and long since crumbled by decay.

It was such a new world to Ursula, and it all seemed so wonderfully fair as she stood watching it from such a distant standpoint, and saw only the beauty which lingers in the thoughts of those to whom it once belonged. Then there came new ideals of life, and the girl listened raptly to the stories of true lovers and the magic

of their love; and her heart grew stronger and purer and finer as she lived under the influence of one who at the far end of life has a witness to bear of the beauty which is fairer than girlhood, and the gladness that is deeper than youth.

"Dear child," said the old lady one day as they sat together under the shade of the beech trees, soothed by the murmur of the tinkling waters far below; "let this touch of nature on your soul make you quick to see and ready to understand."

"It makes me sad and yet comforted," said Ursula with a wondering look.

"Sad because the veil is drawn," continued Mrs. Lyall dreamily, "but comforted because it is after all such a thin one and we can see the Eternal through."

"I am afraid I can't," and the girl spoke sadly; "I never can feel religious. I don't know how."

The old lady took her hand.

"It does not matter much, dear, how you feel, the fact of God's nearness and His goodness cannot be touched by a little girl's ignorance, and He will teach you some day, I feel sure."

"I try frightfully hard to believe about Him," and Ursula's lip trembled.

"But that is not knowing Him, dear. Do not

try 'frightfully hard' any more, for to believe about any one is hardly worth anything when compared with belonging to them in a whole heart's love."

"But why can't I be good?"

"I think, my child, that you are good in a way, and in so far as you can be at present. But you cannot know God until He has revealed Himself to you. In countless ways the revelation comes, and then you will know that whereas you were blind, at last you see."

"When I am sitting up here with you in this lovely garden, trying to follow your thoughts and see your pictures, it all seems so near and easy. But when I get home, and am so tired, it all goes far away again, and I feel vexed with father, and dreadfully impatient of Georgina Carpenter—she is so often at our house now; and then when Gertrude Wainwright talks to me instead of being sympathetic, I feel positively sick at the things she says. And so, you see, dear Mrs. Lyall, it is all in a jumble."

"Poor little girl! But never mind. It all comes under life's discipline, and we must never shirk or want to escape that. We must want to learn through it. Because, dear, you see, it will not matter much when God calls us whether we

laughed or cried on such and such a day; but it will matter everything if we turned a deaf or stupid ear to what He had to say to us then. When I was a child, sometimes my lessons used to be what we called 'turned.' Let us take care that none of the lessons we ought to learn here are 'turned' hereafter."

"I wish I could understand things as you do," said Ursula wistfully.

"But, dear, how could you, seeing that you are at the other end of life? When I was your age I, too, had little spiritual insight, and I do not think I ever thought enough about it to wish otherwise. But experiences came, and through them knowledge. First, I fell in love, and no woman has passed out of the elementary standard until she has tasted of that wonderful experience. Her heart has thus to be opened, and from that point a higher growth begins."

"But is all falling in love like that? I see lots of it about me, and some seems sordid, and some silly, and very little of it really sacred."

"Perhaps that is because you do not see deep enough, my child. An outsider's opinion is never worth much. But there is a touch of the divine in all true love. Look out for it, and you may see it even in the eyes of the little servant girl

on her 'Sunday out,' and wherever you see it, stand reverently on one side, for it is wrought by the finger of God."

"Tell me more," begged Ursula.

"My love story was not a very smooth one," continued the old lady dreamily; "but I had all the more to learn from it for that. And the next great teacher that touched my life was pain, and his lessons are very hard ones. I think you know one or two of them, dear, for I have seen the look of suffering sometimes on your face, and it has hurt me that you should be called into that stern school so young."

Ursula laid her cheek against the frail hand that Mrs. Lyall rested on her shoulder.

"You are very good to me," she whispered.

"And every year brought more knowledge; in sunshine and in shadow it came, and some of it I kept, and some, alas! I let go by."

"Not much, dear Mrs. Lyall; you are so wise and good."

"It seems so, perhaps, to you, my child; but how wonderful it seems to Dick and Dubby when you make the sums come right! It is not really so. And by and by I came to the verge of the dark valley—so much darker for those who only look into it than for the loved ones who pass

through," and the old lady's eyes filled with tears. "It is twenty years now, Ursula, since I have been waiting to follow him and take up our life again in its perfect completeness on the other side."

The girl did not speak, and the hum of nature only broke the stillness of the air. Then there rang out clear and loud a childish laugh, and Ursula sprang up. "I will not let them come and disturb you now," she said softly, but Mrs. Lyall checked her with a smile.

"Do not think, dear, that thoughts of heaven make me impatient of what is still so fair and sweet on earth. I love the children's voices and their merry, sunny faces, and the quaintness of their talk. And Dick is very like his grandfather," she added proudly, "and must grow worthy of him."

"Please, grannie," shouted Dubby as they came in sight, "mayn't we gather some tea-cabbage?"

"What is it, my dear?"

"Lettuce for tea," explained Dick. "Nurse says there's no sense in green-meat for folks that aren't rabbits."

"What a strange idea!" observed Mrs. Lyall; "for myself, indeed, I infinitely prefer vegetable food. It is so much less coarse."

"Nurse's favourite thing to eat is sucking lobster claws," remarked Dubby, "on'y she hides them under her apron if anybody comes."

"That's telling, Dubby," reproved her brother stoutly, "and not fair."

"The boy is right;" and Mrs. Lyall's face lit up with pleasure. "Grandfather would like you always to do what is fair, Dick. It was he who taught your father the same lesson."

"We have never seen grandfather," Dick remarked to Ursula.

"'Cause he's in heaven," piped in Dubby.

"We cannot see your mother now she is in India," their grandmother explained to the children; "but not seeing people does not prevent our knowing that they are well and happy, loving and thinking about us, and wanting us to be good and patient and brave. You can tell Miss Grey about your father and mother as I can you about your grandfather. Do you understand, dears?"

"Yes, please," said Dubby politely, while Dick turned the matter over in his mind.

"Then what's deadness?" he asked thoughtfully.

"I think it is a wrong word, dear," answered his grandmother gently, drawing his eager face

against her own as he stood beside her, "and when people use it, it is because they make a mistake. But," she added dreamily, "it takes a long while to learn the right meaning."

"Have you learned it, grannie?"

"Yes, Dick. But then God gave me your grandfather to teach me."

"Here or in heaven, grannie?" for Dick was considering the matter fully.

"Both, dear," and she softly kissed his rosy cheek.

"We did jography at lessons," began Dubby, who never liked to be left long out of the conversation. "I learned a new country."

"What was its name?" asked Ursula.

Dubby's forehead puckered with thought.

"I think it was Peacock," she said at length.

"Oh, what a good guess!" laughed Ursula. "It is just that kind of bird, only it has a different name."

"I remember," interposed Dick scornfully; "it was Turkey, of course."

"I knowed it was big, and strutted," exclaimed the little girl triumphantly, "I settled it in my mind."

"I am afraid," began Ursula sadly, as Dick and his sister darted off in pursuit of a butterfly,

" that I am not clever enough to do the children justice, dear Mrs. Lyall. I feel that I am failing from the lessons point of view, and Dick is such a bright boy, he ought to have better teaching. I am so sorry," and the girl's lips quivered.

Her friend looked up with a smile.

" Do not fret, little girl," she said kindly. " I understand all that you mean and feel. But I like to have you with the children all the same. Suppose we ask Mr. Carpenter to come up and give Dick some lessons twice a week? Will not that ease your conscience and make things smooth in that troubled mind of yours? And it will be best for the boy to have a man to deal with."

" How good and kind you are!" said Ursula softly.

But as she walked home that afternoon she felt very down and tired. She had failed, and she knew it, though Mrs. Lyall had covered the conviction with such tender hands. And it seemed to Ursula as if, in spite of all her efforts, there was something too strong for her to fight against in the battle of life. She loved Mrs. Lyall for wanting her to stay with the children, for Ursula was too well-bred ever to resent a kindness for fear of the sense of obligation. Indeed, she drew nearer to people who were kind

to her with a feeling of gratitude that warmed, rather than the chill intolerance of favours, which smaller and less fine-fibred natures pride themselves on possessing. She only longed to be able to do more—not for the earning of a wage, but for the expression of a grateful love.

The heavy warmth of late spring in that mild west country made the long walk up and back again too much for her frail strength. Moreover the play with the children and their incessant chatter all the day through took it out of her in too great measure; and the yearnings and feelings roused by Mrs. Lyall's influence beat too strongly along the girl's throbbing nerves.

In a strange, helpless weariness she sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree by the wayside, and her tired thoughts tried to find a momentary resting-place; but everywhere there was work. Work in the home thoughts of small economies and careful planning, and the difficulty of keeping her father happy and amused; work even in the nice thoughts about Merton—of how she should grow up into his fuller, richer life, and learn all the ways to which he in London was becoming accustomed; work in the Rennel Hill life, the power to do which seemed slipping from her stupid hands; work in the deeper thoughts

which the old lady's words stirred up, of how to find out these treasures of the soul, and not let slip the fleeting chances of life. Not even rest in the stretch of nature before her, for the bursting life of spring had swept over the land and the hills, broke forth before it into singing, and all the trees of the fields clapped their hands. So Ursula sat on in utter weariness of mind and body, in despair of ever being able to take the stand to which she felt she was called. David Carpenter, on his way home from afternoon school, stopped in sudden amazement at the sight of her thus.

"What is the matter?" he asked abruptly.

Ursula's eyes filled with tears of weakness.

"I am so tired," she said.

He stood looking at her in silence, and she, catching the concern on his face, smiled a wan little smile.

"It is foolish of me," she explained, "but I am a bit done up."

David frowned fiercely. "You had no business to be!" he muttered below his breath.

"I can't help it," and the silly tears welled up again. "Don't scold me."

David flushed up to the roots of his thick black hair.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Nothing, thanks! I shall be all right when I have rested for a little. But—oh, Mr. Carpenter! I have failed again, and it does hurt so."

"How do you mean?" and he slashed the grass and wayside weeds savagely with his stick.

"I cannot really teach, and so—and so Mrs. Lyall is going to ask you to come and do the work. Don't tell your sister—will you?—the reason why."

"Of course not. But you are still to go up to Rennel Hill?"

"Yes; Mrs. Lyall is so good and kind. I shall always love her for it. But—Dick is only seven, and yet I can't teach well enough even for him." And the girl's head dropped like a broken-stemmed flower.

"And why should you?" David's voice sounded almost stern. "You are not strong enough to bear the wear and tear of such a life—it sometimes fags even me, and look at my physique. Besides, it is better for a boy to rub up against a man in school work. Don't bother yourself," he added shyly; "'tisn't worth while. And you'll have quite enough work driving the little chap through his preparation—and it will

be better for both of you to —" and then he stopped.

"Have a master," added Ursula with a smile. "It will be like old days again almost, won't it?" And her small face looked wonderfully like the little girl's that David remembered so well at Miss Paterson's school.

"Don't go just yet," as he made a sudden movement.

"Are you going to faint or anything of that kind?" he asked in a helpless kind of way.

"Of course not. I believe you are frightened of me!" and she smiled again.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "I will get you a glass of milk from that cottage. It is only a few minutes down the lane. You won't mind my going there?"

"Oh, no! The milk will be nice."

Ursula wondered in an idle kind of way how he possibly could have gone to the cottage and back in the few minutes during which he was absent. But then he had very long legs.

"That is so refreshing!" she said gratefully as she drained the glass. "It was good of you to fetch it."

"Don't go to Rennel Hill again until you are better," and David's brow puckered.

"I shall be better to-morrow."

"And don't play with those noisy youngsters these first warm days."

"What a lot of good advice you are giving me!" said Ursula lightly. "I feel so much better now, I can go on home."

"Sure?" queried David.

"Perfectly. Thank you so much. I don't know what I should have done if you had not come my way. That is one of the compensations for being stupid and weak—people are so good to you."

David Carpenter stood watching her as she walked on down into the distance. And when at last a twist in the road hid her from his sight, he turned back and followed in her track. As he reached the outskirts of Winstow he met Georgina hurrying home.

"Why! what brings you going the wrong way?" she exclaimed sharply.

"I have to go back into the town," said David vaguely. Why, he hardly knew himself, and he would not have told Georgina if he had. It saved so much trouble when his sister could be kept out of his concerns. David was quite enough of a man to go his own way independently of all Georgina's strictures; but he was

also man enough to detest a noisy woman's indignation, and so to avoid the expression of it as much as possible.

"Well, make haste, or you will be late for tea. Indeed, you are that now. And I should advise you to sharpen your memory in the future. Your head should save your heels, but men are so stupid!" Then as he was moving off, she added, "Let me go back for you, David, if it is anything I can do. I have not had nearly so much walking as you have to-day, and no doubt you are tired. And I can easily hurry back into the town, and be home by the time you have done mooning round your books."

"No, thank you," began David, but she interrupted him.

"You haven't a bit of sense, or notion of taking care of yourself. I insist upon going," and her voice rose.

"You cannot," he replied, slightly frowning as he turned on his heel. And he went on, oblivious of the unselfishness of Georgina's offer in his irritation at her manner of proffering it. So do women like Georgina continually spoil the purity of their motives by the ugliness of their methods.

David Carpenter found Ursula and her father

at tea. He felt that he must know of her safe arrival.

"Come in," cried the girl as he passed the window. And then she shook her head at him and held a warning finger to her lips.

"Are you better?" he blurted out, not noticing her signs.

"Better!" exclaimed Mr. Grey in an injured voice at any one's health being inquired after before his own—"Ursula's quite well; aren't you, child?"

"Oh, yes, father. I was only a little tired, and Mr. Carpenter found me resting on the way. That made me late."

"She ought not to go up that long pull to Rennel Hill to-morrow?" persisted David.

"Pooh, pooh! Carpenter!" said Mr. Grey; "Ursula can take care of herself. She is looking remarkably well, in my opinion, this evening."

The effort to laugh and talk had brought a little feverish flush on to the girl's pale cheeks.

"Spring is a trying time, Mr. Grey."

"It is indeed. You cannot think how much it affects my rheumatism. I can hardly move my left arm. And it is so much worse, too, in the nights. I think the damp rises from the river.

This house lies a little low for me, but we have to make the best of things in this world."

"Have some tea?" said Ursula, meeting David's glance with a smile.

"No, thank you; I must be getting home," and he looked grimly at the table with its very meagre show of provisions. David would almost have eaten everything up at one mouthful, and in a blundering way he felt somehow distressed that Ursula was not sitting down to a richer board.

"Yes, you are right," mused Mr. Grey; "spring is a trying time. Perhaps that accounts for my feeling so extra unwell of late. Ursula can hardly tempt my appetite, even with the extra little delicacies that she makes herself —and there is a languor through one's whole being. But you are one of those fortunate men, Carpenter, who are always strong and well. It is a great boon is health. I wish I knew where to seek it." But it is doubtful whether Mr. Grey would have pursued the investigation even if he had.

"Summer will be here soon," said Ursula hopefully, "and then we shall all be quite well."

"Tut, tut, Ursula! It is not for young folks to be affected by the seasons or weather or such

like, and I don't like to hear you talk as if you were. It is different when you come to my age."

"Good-bye," David interposed.

"It is very kind of you to call and inquire after me," continued Mr. Grey. "Your sister would doubtless tell you of my recent attack."

"Take care of yourself," said David shortly.

"I will try, only it is such a burden!" answered Mr. Grey. But David was looking at Ursula as he spoke.

CHAPTER VI

TOWN LIFE

When Merton first entered a government office he had a vague impression that it would be a fairy palace of power, wherein laws were made as easily as quill pens, and the staff thereof as giants ruling in their strength. And though he soon learned that fairy palaces are not to be found in Whitehall more than anywhere else in this working-day world, he took an absorbing interest in the acquirement of the new work there; grasping it so thoroughly, and becoming so quickly a master of all its branches, that he secured the approval of his superior officer, and rapidly won a reputation for ability and industry. So that, when an unexpected series of promotions created a vacancy in the office of private secretary to Mr. Mandeville, to Merton's great delight he was selected to fill the post. He felt an awe-stricken admiration, which clutched at his throat and heated his brow, as he was first ushered into the august presence of the head of the department; but human nature is still to be found even

within such lordly precincts, and it was not long before Merton discovered that Mr. Mandeville was a man first and a cabinet minister afterwards, and that such trifles as opening a letter with one's thumb instead of with the prescribed paper-knife, and putting a letter on one table which belonged by right to another, were enough to ruffle the calm of a mind which compassed the government of countries and the diplomacy of courts. Moreover, it was a further shock to the young man to find that this fresh work apparently made no demands on the stores of knowledge which he had been obliged to lay up for its attainment.

"Reading and writing and a little arithmetic is all that is needed as far as I can see," he thought somewhat ruefully, as he sealed up a batch of letters which were all he had to show for a full day's work. This was after his pleasure in posting unstamped letters had begun to wear commonplace. For all delight in outside things so quickly fades, just as delight in inside ones never does. A proof that it is the inside joys—knowing and feeling and loving—which are the eternal ones, and those with which our lives, both here and hereafter, shall be most surely blessed.

"Oh, my dears," exclaimed Mrs. Wainwright on the receipt of Merton's first letter after his appointment, which bore the big royal crest and came without the official stamp, "it gives me quite a turn to see such an envelope, for it seems as if the lad had done wrong, and yet was somehow too grand to be blamed for it."

"But it is his right to be able to send letters now without stamps," argued Gladys. "I am sure if I were Merton I should write to everybody I could think of just to show them what a swell I am."

"He is not doing wrong, I am sure I hope," continued the anxious mother. "Young people are a bit apt to get carried off their feet, and I shouldn't like Merton to presume in any way."

"Presume fiddlesticks!" chimed in Mr. Wainwright testily. "It is poor enough pay for such a high and mighty office even with a few penny stamps thrown in."

"The paper is something beautiful, isn't it, papa?" and Mrs. Wainwright handed him the letter. "That lovely lion and unicorn fighting for the crown has such a style of its own."

"Leave the envelope on the mantelpiece," suggested Gladys, "so that the Holts can see it

when they call. Beatrice told me they were coming this afternoon."

When the first enthusiasm for his work was wearing off, and Merton had learned to arrive at his office not earlier than eleven o'clock, which in his youth and innocence he began to do at half-past nine, he was filled with a somewhat tremulous joy by an invitation to dine at his chief's house on the following Wednesday.

"Rather short notice, Wainwright. But you must excuse that, and do Lady Clementina a good turn by filling a vacant place for her. Little Johnny Upton has tumbled off his pony and broken a collar bone or a rib or something."

"Poor little chap!" exclaimed Merton, wondering why a small boy was going out to a dinner-party.

Mr. Mandeville looked up surprised:—

"Do you know Johnny?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"He is six foot four in his socks," continued Mr. Mandeville quietly, "and rides sixteen stone. That is why every one calls him little Johnny Upton, I suppose. His horse slipped at Hyde Park Corner. Might have been a nasty spill."

"I shall be very glad to come. Please thank Lady Clementina, and say how extremely good I

think it is of her to ask me. What time is dinner, sir?"

"Oh, usual time," replied the great man absently, and Merton dared not ask him what that might be, though he could not himself feel certain. After a good deal of thought on the subject he decided on a quarter before eight, and arrived in Grosvenor Square at that time. The drawing-room was empty and the butler pityingly reproachful, but just then a girl came in with a large bunch of roses in her hand, and Merton thought he had never seen so fair a vision before.

Violet Mandeville was a tall, rather pretty, golden-haired girl, but it was the beauty of her white frock and the indescribable something about her whole appearance which is due to the skill of a well-trained maid that appealed so strongly to Merton. He had never been accustomed to that look in his own world, and so it was not a matter of course to him that hair should be so daintily dressed, and clothes so becomingly made.

"I am too early," he hastily explained. "I did not know what time dinner was. I am so sorry. My name is Wainwright, and I am Mr. Mandeville's private secretary."

"Oh! it's all right," exclaimed the girl pleasantly, "only it's always the way with father. He is so stupid about social things. But I am glad you have come. You can help me to arrange these roses. Aren't they jolly ones, and with such good figures too? I hate roses cut only for their faces—it makes them like cherubs and postage stamps."

"But doesn't it rather impoverish the trees cutting so much wood with each bloom?"

"Oh! what does that matter?" and she stepped back a pace or two to judge of the effect of her handiwork, "there are plenty more. Wouldn't you like one for your buttonhole? Here is a bud specially made for a buttonhole." And Merton's pulses beat considerably faster as she pinned the dainty little nosegay in his coat.

He used to imagine that the gift of a rose meant so much, and the wearing of it a pledge of something that had not yet been put into words, though none the less real for that. For to put thoughts and feeling into words sometimes hampers and distorts them, and we want a more delicate and subtle language to accurately convey to each other the countless shades and variations of these complex characters of ours.

"How do you like being father's private sec-

retary?" continued Violet in a confidential voice, which the young man thought particularly delightful.

"Immensely. Mr. Mandeville has been most kind to me."

"Oh! he always means well," replied his daughter frankly, "and I suppose he can't help being a little stupid and tiresome at times. But I must confess that it is a marvel to me how a man who isn't clever enough to carve a fowl can be clever enough to govern a country."

Merton caught his breath at this style of conversation. The head of his department was still such a tremendous personage in the young man's eyes.

"But you should just see him try to carve a hare," Violet went on. "It is such a superb effort. And the only drawback is that he never can get enough off it to feed even one person. Now when the butler carves it, five of us have enough and to spare. Do you think the cleverness lies in father or the butler in this instance?"

Merton laughed, and felt delightfully at ease with this merry-faced girl.

"I suppose father is cleverer than the butler," she remarked demurely, "or else Stanton would be a secretary of state too. And that would

be more than we could bear. One secretary of state in a family is quite enough. Don't you think so?"

Merton had never heard any one talk nonsense before. Indeed he had been brought up to consider that nonsense had no place in civilised conversation. But Violet Mandeville was decidedly civilised, and yet this nonsense sounded absolutely charming from her laughing lips.

"It is going to be a dreadfully heavy party to-night, Mr. Wainwright. We shall have to try the alphabet system, I feel sure."

"And what is that?" asked Merton eagerly.

"It is an invention of Victoria's. Victoria is my eldest sister, and if she had been a boy she would have been a Lord Chancellor or an Archbishop of Canterbury, or something equally wonderful, by now. At least, that is what father always says when he is regretting her sex. Dicky isn't either, you know. And somehow, between ourselves, I am afraid he never will be, if it is as difficult as squeezing through the militia into the army, which he has just accomplished by means of a miracle and a war and an uncle who is one of the generals in command."

"But about the alphabet?" repeated the young man.

"Oh, yes! I had forgotten that. Well, you see, it is like this. We start subjects alphabetically, and the one who gets furthest on into the alphabet has had the dullest man to take her in. I always have academy for A, but Victoria says that is dreadfully unoriginal of me. She has a new A at every party, such as the army, or asceticism, or art; but then Victoria is frightfully clever."

"And what for B?"

"Oh, books; that is easy enough—or bicycles. Here comes Victoria," as another girl entered the room. "I have been telling Mr. Wainwright about your alphabet system, Vic. What shall you have for B to-night?"

Victoria Mandeville was much shorter and darker than her sister, and though not so good-looking she was equally stylish and well-dressed.

"Who is to take me in?" she asked, after shaking hands with Merton.

"Sir Joseph Elkin," replied her sister, consulting a written list.

"Then it will be biliousness," exclaimed Victoria glibly, "and I don't expect I shall get any further than that. Sir Joseph is so often bilious, and, what is more, he owns to it, which always strikes me as singularly heroic. But it brings

its own reward, nevertheless, for he does so enjoy detailing all the symptoms, poor dear. And he has to be so careful about his diet. At least, he says so, otherwise I shouldn't have known it, because I have sat next him at dinner lots of times."

"But he must eat something," suggested Violet.

"Yes, dear. And because he must I suppose he does. Do you always do what you must?" and she appealed to Merton.

"I hope so," he answered, smiling.

"Then you make a great mistake," and Victoria shook her dainty little forefinger at him. "Believe me, it is the thin end of the wedge. We always tell father it will land him in the House of Lords one of these days if he doesn't take care, and that makes him dreadfully hot and nervous. But you must speak sternly to your parents sometimes for their own good, you know."

"We are always kind but firm with ours," chimed in Violet, "and mother is really a credit to any child. She never dreams of asking whom one's letters are from, or where you bought the flowers you are wearing, or whom you saw when you were out."

"But we cannot have many mothers like she is."

"I wish we could have one father," sighed Violet. "I would not ask for more. Just think, if only father never asked us questions how much easier this life would be!"

"And the next," added Victoria, "if we have to pay the penalty of all our prevarications. Oh, dear me! what trials one's parents may be! And yet it seems selfish never to have any. And I do hate selfishness in family life. I am frightfully unselfish, aren't I, Violet? You'll begin to notice it when you are a little more intimate with us, Mr. Wainwright."

Merton had not an idea what to say to all this badinage, but he enjoyed it in a wonderful, new way that he could not possibly have described. Jokes and laughter had had such a small place in his life up till now, except such as his sisters indulged in, which always rubbed him the wrong way and made him slightly disgusted. So he had grown up to despise merriment as vulgar, and to believe himself superior to amusement. Ursula was well bred, but she was never funny; and so he had concluded the two were incompatible. The upsetting of this theory before he had been ten minutes with the Mandeville girls

was a delightful experience; for Merton, together with most people, really enjoyed being made to laugh. And this without any social sacrifice seemed almost too good to be true.

"Nobody has ever gone past L in the alphabet," began Victoria thoughtfully, as she wrestled with the multitude of buttons on her glove, "because no woman ever can get beyond so engrossing a subject as lovers, nor man beyond the still more engrossing one of livers. There really is nothing else important for either of them to talk about."

"I would rather talk about lovers than livers, any day," said Merton, feeling suddenly cleverer than he had ever done in his life before, which was saying a good deal considering his past successes.

"Then you are a strange man," and Victoria's merry blue eyes twinkled as she glanced up at him; "or else rather a young one, you know," she added quietly.

"I never met a man who talked about lovers in the abstract," Violet interposed.

"It isn't in the abstract that they talk about livers either, my dear child," corrected her elder sister. "You see, it is like this. Before a man is in love he doesn't know enough about lovers

to talk about them, and after he is in love he knows too much to talk about them, so where are you? But a woman is different. She can always talk about things, whether she knows anything about them or not. And that saves a world of trouble, and makes us such nice, interesting, adaptable creatures. But how fearfully late every one is to-night! It is nearly half-past eight, and I am so hungry."

"It is a good thing, because mother is wearing a new frock, and it is always so difficult to get into a new gown."

"Until there is a proper entrance made by traffic," added Victoria. "But here she comes, with the Lessingtons on her heels!"

And Merton fell into the background as the room quickly filled, and the buzz of chatter grew louder, until the mystic silence that indicates the announcement of dinner fell upon the crowd for an instant, and then broke into a murmur of talk from the departing couples, swelling like a rippling stream which is soon to reach a roaring sea below.

Merton had never enjoyed anything so much in his life before as that dinner-party. He took Violet down; and she talked to him so brightly and so intimately, that he felt he had suddenly

been lifted into another world, wherein there was waiting for him a proper place. The Mandevilles possessed that social instinct which makes everybody feel at home and all their entertainments a success. And it amazed Merton to discover how easy it was to make friends with people to whom society is a science and enjoyment an art.

"Come and see us again soon," said Victoria graciously, taking a seat near him in the drawing-room afterwards. "We are always at home on Sundays."

"I should like to awfully." And Merton spoke sincerely.

Now Victoria Mandeville had that way of speaking to every man which made him feel as if he were the one man in the world to her; and perhaps he was—for a time, though the length of that time varied from three minutes to quite six months.

"We ought to see a great deal of each other, you know," she continued, with her pleasant smile, "because being father's private secretary makes you a kind of relation of ours, doesn't it? And since Dicky went abroad we are rather hard up for masculine relations. Pat is only a schoolboy."

Merton flushed with pleasure. The idea of being related to the Mandevilles, though only in imagination, was the most piquant and delicious one that she could have suggested. Now Victoria, whose quick eyes read people's secrets with wonderful accuracy, knew this perfectly well, and it was a genuine wish to give him pleasure, as well as to make herself attractive to him, that prompted her to set about healing the one sore place from which she knew this young man suffered.

"You are most kind, Miss Mandeville." And then waxing confidential, "I hardly know any one yet in London except a few men I was with at the 'Varsity."

"Oh, it always takes a little time to feel at home in a new place," said Victoria, to whom the idea of London as a "new place" was really incomprehensible. "But you must cease to regard us as strangers, and drop in often. Mother will be so glad if you will. You were at Oxford, I do hope?"

"Oh! yes. I got a scholarship at Oriel."

"A scholarship!" she exclaimed. "How clever and delightful and wonderful of you! I don't think I have ever met any one before who had won a real live scholarship in the

memory of man—or rather in the memory of woman, which doesn't usually extend over many years. But wasn't it frightfully difficult?"

"Oh, no!" And Merton's face positively glowed with pride and pleasure. "Not half so difficult as the Civil Service exam."

"I can't think why there need be such tiresome things as examinations at all. Women never pass examinations, and yet they know everything that is necessary. My father's brother is a judge, and he has often taken me into court. Well, I always knew whether the prisoner was innocent or guilty during the first five minutes, so what on earth was the use of all the fuss and prosiness of a trial?"

"But how did you know, Miss Mandeville?"

"By intuition, of course. There is no other way of really knowing anything—except, I suppose, by the old-fashioned system of experience, which is quite out of date. I remember a trial about obtaining money under false pretences, in which a young woman took in Uncle Edward and a whole tableful of barristers just because her hair was golden. I supposed they proved it by Euclid, or logic, or something equally absurd—Euclid did own to being absurd sometimes, didn't he?—that as angels have golden hair,

so the aforesaid golden hair denotes an angel. Q. E. D."

"'Which is absurd' you should quote, instead of Q. E. D."

"It always seems to me silly of Euclid to waste so much time in proving impossible things, almost as silly as the people who learn them."

"But we are obliged to," began Merton, with the thought of examinations fresh in his mind, but Victoria went on:

"As I was saying, of course I knew the person was a fraud the moment I entered the court, so what was the use of having a judge and a trial and a prosecution and a defence and witnesses and barristers *ad libitum*, when I should have done just as well—in fact much better, for the young woman got off, and it was a year before she was caught red-handed in a similar act?"

"But then you are specially clever, I expect."

"I have several specialities, Mr. Wainwright. My father once said I was the most inaccurate woman that had ever been created. I felt quite proud of being a *chef d'œuvre* in any direction. I suppose I inherit it from him. He is considered one of the greatest financiers in the present government, you know."

"Your sister told me all the people at dinner," began Merton, already copying the Mandevilles' confidential tone, "but I forget the name of that lady in green who is talking to Mr. Mandeville now."

"Oh, that is Lilla Langbridge. She is one of those tiresome women who belong to the Intelligence Department of Society, and are always imparting information—real, solid information about countries and climates and trade winds and exports, and all the things one learned in the geography books of one's youth, but ought to have forgotten long ago. Poor father! He is playing with his watch-chain. That means he can't hold out much longer. It's time his relations were sent for, so I'll go and rescue him before it's too late."

"And what shall I do?" asked Merton.

"Oh, I will bring Lilla over to you. Pull yourself together, and be a man, Mr. Wainwright, and think of all the heroes you have heard of from Casabianca onwards."

So she flitted across the room, and with the grace of perfect ease effected a readjustment of couples in a way that filled Merton with astonished admiration.

On the following Sunday, which seemed a long

while in coming, Merton presented himself once more in Grosvenor Square. The drawing-room was full of people, but Lady Clementina, as well as her daughters, welcomed him with so much graciousness that he felt the delightful sensation of being really wanted even in this new and fashionable world. It was this innate friendliness that made people so ready to forgive Lady Clementina for her often school-girlish frivolity, and also enhanced the brilliant charm of her clever daughters by establishing the fact that no one need ever be afraid of them.

"How nice of you to come and see us so soon!" exclaimed Victoria from behind the tea-table, round which a crowd of men clustered, "but I am not going to let you have any tea for a long while yet. Partly because this is cold, and partly because you will not be able to run away until you have had some. So you must be patient, like a dog 'on trust.' I always think that is such an idiotic game to play with a sensible quadruped, because nobody could ever wait to eat their meals until they are paid for unless they lived in A B C shops."

"And things to eat you pay for are so very indigestible as a rule," drawled one of the group, "you couldn't possibly live on them for long.

Buns and station sandwiches! What a death to die!"

"I saw an account in the paper the other day of a woman who died from overeating. Wasn't it horrid and Henry-the-Firstish? I would sooner die of anything else there is to die of."

"Well, my dear Vic," chimed in Violet, who had just drawn near with an empty cup, "that seems to me a matter in which you will be allowed a choice. It rests entirely with yourself to avoid such a doom."

"I hope Lady Langbridge doesn't want any more tea?" asked Victoria, "because this is quite cold."

"Oh, it isn't," said her sister soothingly. "Here, let me feel," and she dipped the end of her little finger in the teapot.

"Your methods are original, Miss Violet," whispered one of the young men.

"And very disgusting, dear," added Victoria.

"They are not," argued Violet; "because, don't you see? if the tea is cool enough for me to bear my finger in, it is obviously too cold for any one to drink. But if it is too hot for my immersion there is no harm done. I think it a splendid plan, don't you?" and she appealed with a charming smile to Merton, who had been

listening to Victoria and looking at Violet ever since he entered the room.

"Major Trayne has just told me," continued Victoria to the group, while Merton's eyes followed her pretty younger sister across the room, "that he is never going to marry. Isn't it stupid and dull of him?"

"It would be stupider and duller if I did," argued the culprit, looking up lazily from the contemplation of his patent leather boots. "That is why I arrived at my present decision. I simply couldn't face the thought of dining with the same person every day for a year even. And longer!" And he threw up his hands.

"Well, between ourselves," replied Victoria, "and all you other people mustn't listen—it would be rather awful. I never thought of that, but when Sir William Murphy took me down at three dinner parties running it was insupportable."

"But then you would not probably have been married to Sir William Murphy," suggested young Lord Windermere.

"Of course not," and Victoria laughed her clear little laugh. "What a clever boy you are! You ought to go into Parliament and be somebody's under-secretary, because you can find the

answers to questions so splendidly. You make up father's answers, don't you, Mr. Wainwright —those that make him seem so wise and omniscient?"

Merton was just beginning to explain that this part of the work fell to one of his superiors, when Victoria rattled on:

"And if you married any one, you never would take her into dinner, you see, Major Trayne. So that objection falls to the ground."

"Ah, but, Miss Mandeville, there is a more deeply-seated reason still," and he helped himself to another sandwich. "I am overworked and require rest. I could not possibly look after a wife; and yet I could not bear the sort of wife that does not require looking after. No, the whole thing is fraught with difficulty, and the only solution is—remain as I am."

"It isn't a bad idea," said Victoria, looking up at him with a half-smile; and then with seeming irrelevance she added, "I went with my little sisters to a dancing-class the other day, and every time the music stopped the mistress called out, 'Young ladies, as you were!' It struck me as a specially wise attitude. Perhaps a little difficult at times, but dancing-classes and life are supposed to teach some difficult steps."

"Advance and retire," quoted Arthur Trayne. "Yes, I have done both before setting to partners and making my bow."

"Mr. Wainwright," said Violet suddenly at his elbow, "let us have a picnic; and bring me some tea as well as your own to that little table. Admiral Kingston is sure to stay quite three hours, and we must be strong to relieve each other on guard. Mother has him now, but I must be built up to step into her place when she drops with exhaustion."

Merton remembered how he used to contemn afternoon tea as a meal; but taken under a palm in a corner of the Mandevilles' drawing-room, in company with such a charming companion, was an experience by no means to be despised.

"Don't you love London?" she asked suddenly, helping herself to a sugared cake.

"No! Yes! I think so," stammered Merton, whose feelings were somewhat in a whirl. "It was just a little dull at first after Oxford, you know."

"London can't be dull for long," she remarked emphatically, in her utter ignorance of that dull, grey, grinding world of work that lies below the gaily-coloured one of society. "It is just packed

cramful of treats, as you will soon find out for yourself! Victoria and I simply love it."

"Should you mind if I asked you an impertinently curious question?" said Merton, in a sudden burst of confidence.

"Of course not," replied his companion pleasantly.

"Is your sister engaged to that man she is talking to over there?" And Merton's face flushed a little at his own audacity.

Violet looked across the room.

"I don't think so," she said thoughtfully; "not to that one. At least, now I come to think of it, she is not engaged to any one just now."

Merton's face expressed intense astonishment.

"I hope you are not offended with me for asking?" he pleaded penitently.

"Offended!" and she laughed merrily. "How could I be at such a simple little question as that. People are always asking it. But I am really sometimes not quite sure. Neither, I believe, is Victoria. But the men over there are chiefly what I call green vegetables."

"Green vegetables!" repeated Merton mystified.

"Well, you see, once Victoria was properly engaged, and she thought she was tremendously

in love, and got so queer and *exaltée* that I was afraid she would be ill, because Victoria is not an *exalté* person by nature, you know."

"She is wonderfully charming," Merton chimed in.

"But he was rather a tiresome, jealous man, and wanted her all to himself; and she missed her usual flirting so dreadfully that she grew like sailors or Arctic explorers, I said, who are obliged to live on pressed beef, and get no green vegetables, till they are quite ill for want of them. Victoria was almost ill for want of mental green vegetables, so she broke it off."

"And what did the man say?"

"He was terribly overwrought and upset. But then if one of them had got to be ill, you must see that it was better for it not to be Victoria."

"Yes, of course," said Merton dubiously.

"I was so thankful when Richard was himself again. And wasn't it silly of the man? He actually wouldn't be friends, but went off shooting big game, or digging gold-mines, or something equally absurd. He is sure to be eaten or ruined, and Victoria will be so vexed."

It was strange to Merton's ears to hear such subjects openly discussed, but it gave him a delightfully reckless feeling that nothing much

mattered except enjoyment. Everything was so serious at home; even Ursula was generally serious, and the feelings of friendship or sympathy or compassion which she inspired were always serious ones. And Merton began to think that it was nicer not to be serious, and was dazzled by the bright light of this gay world which was the Mandevilles' home. He did not realise that it is only the outside expression of life after all which can be daintily dressed and made attractive, that the underlying realities are both serious and strong, and it is only a fashion to gloss them over—a fashion in one set to prove there is no such thing as mortality, just as in another set it is the fashion to prove that there is no such thing as immortality; but the fashion, nevertheless, is powerless to touch the fact. Only Merton, being young enough to feel very sure of his right estimate of things, suddenly decided that this aspect of life was the true one; that Violet's merry blue eyes saw things as they really were quite as well as Ursula's sorrowful grey ones, and in a measure his opinion was correct, seeing that life is as full of sunshine as it is of shadow; the difference in our outlook being the particular little patch of the world in which our lot is cast.

"I believe I am rather afraid of Miss Mandeville," said Merton slowly.

"Of Victoria! People generally are at first. We have told her she ought to send a man before her with a red flag, as if she were a steam-roller; but when you know her better, you will find she is always so good-natured that it is waste of feeling to be afraid."

"She might laugh at one," continued Merton cautiously.

"And what if she does? We always laugh at everybody—ourselves included. Oh! here comes father and the little girls. We count Blanche still as a little girl, because she won't be seventeen till next season. But she is going to be the beauty of the family. Victoria is the genius, you know."

"And what are you?" and Merton's voice unconsciously softened.

"Only a meagre six of one and half-a-dozen of the other," laughed Violet. "But neither Victoria nor I were ever quite as young as Blanche is. It is a new fad of mother's. She wants her kept fresh, and she is with a vengeance. You can't think what killing things she says."

"She is very lovely," Merton murmured.

"Yes; and with a complexion like that and

hair so golden, mother said she must not know as much as Victoria and I always did. It would spoil the whole thing. Of course," meditatively, "my hair is light enough, but then Victoria and I are such friends."

"And what are your youngest sisters going to be?" asked Merton, glancing at the two small girls with long light-brown hair and still longer light-brown legs.

"Oh! we haven't settled about them yet. Now I must go and take my share of the admiral before mother drops."

"And who must I talk to?"

Violet wrinkled her brow and pursed up her laughing lips.

"You might have had one round with Lilla, only she has annexed father. She has been here for two hours and twenty minutes, and she has never ceased being intelligent for one instant. I would have forgiven and forgotten everything if only she had said one silly thing."

"I met her here at dinner."

"Father thinks he likes intelligence," continued Violet demurely. "He will know for certain before this day is dead."

"You even laugh at Mr. Mandeville!" exclaimed Merton.

"Dear man," remarked his daughter, "we often have a joke as well as many other good things at his expense. Now go and listen to Victoria. One of the seats in her little amphitheatre is empty, and she can't bear a gap in the stalls."

"I am feeling terribly depressed," Victoria was saying. "I dare say you have all noticed it. I heard such a beautiful sermon this morning. It was on unselfishness."

"But you are unselfish, Miss Mandeville," chimed in a young guardsman kindly.

"Of course I am—stupid! If I have a besetting sin it is unselfishness. But the bishop adjured us all to do something we didn't like at once for the good of others. And—four different people invited me back to luncheon. It is depressing, isn't it?"

"My dear Victoria!" exclaimed Lady Clementina, sinking into a chair beside the tea-table, "who was that sweet, good lady in black who has just gone? I have no idea, only she seemed to be somebody's mother."

"I think she must have been one of the footman's friends," said Victoria thoughtfully. "You see," she explained to the group, "mother has quite a little circle of them! This is how it comes about. While she is calling at one house

she says it saves time to send Charles and the carriage round with a few cards. I never know what guides him as to where to leave them, but we make a lot of new friends that way."

"My dear child, don't be so foolish," laughed her mother. "I am sure she was a delightful creature, and somebody I have known for years."

"Admiral Kingston does deaden the brain a bit," continued Victoria. "I can only take him once every four hours, that is, to preserve my reason. Oh, must you go, Captain Trayne? Come to tea on the terrace on Tuesday. Father is going to have a party."

Merton found himself also included in the House of Commons tea-party, and watched the weather with boyish eagerness for the next twenty-four hours. His heart leapt at the Monday evening's rosy sunset, and he indulged in that delight which is supposed to be the prerogative of shepherds under such circumstances.

Mr. Mandeville was so statesmanlike, and Lady Clementina so easy, and Victoria so amusing, and Violet so—he could not quite decide what Violet preëminently was. Only he did so like the tinkle of her laugh and the sheen on her hair, and the rustle of her skirts.

"I don't expect father will be able to come to

his party after all," explained Victoria to the assembled guests on the terrace. "He generally entertains by proxy. But he is just engaged now in 'answering back,'—a thing our governess always punished severely."

"And mother is mislaid somewhere," added Violet. "Our new footman is so careless, and he has lost her."

"It is so fortunate that you are with us, dear aunt," said Victoria, patting a gentle, puzzled-looking lady on the shoulder, "or we should have been chaperonless."

"Charles will have to leave," and Violet's voice saddened, "even though he is six foot one."

"I saw a book advertised the other day called *The Break-up of China*," continued Victoria. "I think it must have been written in our pantry."

"And he is always losing things, too, isn't he, Vic?"

"In one week he has lost a train, his temper, and the lady of the house. It is really too wearing!"

"Speaking of China," began Aunt Annabel, who was known to the world as the Countess of Maidenhead, "I once read a most interesting article—or else it was the report of a speech, I

forget which—all about something in China, which was so instructive. I read it aloud to your uncle one evening. Do you remember, girls?"

"I believe it was a pamphlet on Japan," suggested Victoria.

"Well, now that I come to think of it, that does seem more likely. But China and Japan are all so mixed up in one's mind. Don't you think so, Mr.—Mr.——?" and she looked up helplessly at Merton.

"Yes, the two countries are apt to run into each other in our thoughts," he answered quickly, "though really they are such distinct peoples."

"Are they?" exclaimed Lady Maidenhead, slightly surprised. "They always seem to me to have the same kind of faces and quaint-shaped eyes. But then one sees so few of them except just at the embassy parties. I was only saying to Madeline yesterday—do you know my Madeline, Mr.—Mr.——?"

"Wainwright," suggested Merton, smiling. "No, I am afraid I have not met her."

"She is such a sweet darling," continued her mother, "and so clever. Only of course I do not like her to know much about anything yet. She

is so young and fresh. And so many books are not quite suitable nowadays for very young girls. Don't you think is it better to be careful?"

"Most assuredly," agreed Merton.

"I never let her read anything that I have not first read myself, and that is so awkward, because, you see, being so much in town, and Lord Maidenhead's not having anything to do between the hunting and shooting, I really have no time for finishing books even if I begin them."

"Which is always so unsatisfactory," suggested Merton.

"Indeed it is. And I am so fond of reading, only unfortunately it has such a lulling effect that I cannot help falling asleep. And then somehow the book goes back to Mudie's, and one never has another chance with it." And Lady Maidenhead sighed.

"Is Madeline coming this afternoon?" asked Violet.

"No, dear. She has gone to her committee meeting. She and I have started such a sweet guild, Mr. Wainwright, of which she is the vice-president. It is quite simple, and the rule of it is that one must speak a word in season every day.

I think so much good is done by 'words in season.' And then every other day you have to do an act of love."

"I expect Joyce Merlyn belongs to aunt's guild," said Victoria softly, "because just before twelve o'clock at the Lessingtons' ball I saw her kissing a man in the conservatory. It must have been a last effort on one of the every other days."

"And supposing they do not comply with the rules?" asked Merton with interest. He would not have dared to have made fun of a countess in those early days of society life.

"There is a penalty." And Lady Maidenhead looked rather sad. "At first the idea of such a thing distressed me greatly. I never can bear to remember about punishment of any kind. It seems so harsh and cruel. I hardly left off crying for a fortnight after I heard Pangbourne had been flogged at Eton. And I required a tonic for quite a long while."

"But that is such ancient history, aunt dear," interrupted Violet soothingly, "and Pangbourne is such a splendid boy now, and doing so well. He is actually in the eleven," she explained to Merton.

"He never deserved it, I am sure," sighed

Lady Maidenhead. "There must have been some mistake. But schoolmasters cannot understand a boy's character in the way his own mother does, and appearances are often so misleading."

"Deuced lot of good it does a fellow getting licked," chimed in a jovial old colonel who had joined the party, "and the oftener the better, which is how we were made men of in the good old days!"

"Oh! how dreadful!" gasped her ladyship. "But you have not a mother's heart, Colonel Hammond."

"Begad, I've not!" he laughed cheerily. "Ah, my lady, you have the advantage of me there."

"Visitors are requested not to tease the peeresses," whispered Victoria, as Merton bent over the tea-tray to assist. "Do keep Colonel Hammond off, Aunt Annabel, and go and talk to her gently about the prevalence of preventable diseases in public schools, and suggest to her to write to *The Times* because Pangbourne cannot be properly fed, seeing that he spends about ten shillings a day on luxuries."

"Oh, here is mother!" exclaimed Violet, as Lady Clementina rustled up to them, beaming with delighted laughter.

"Such a joke!" she at last calmed herself suf-

ficiently to explain, "and quite an adventure! Do listen everybody."

"But have some tea first," begged her eldest daughter, "because people who have been cast on desert islands are always hungry and thirsty."

"I can't think how the cabman could have been so stupid," began Lady Clementina, "but he must have misunderstood me, for instead of bringing me here he drove me to an enormous hospital somewhere."

"But the carriage went for you," interrupted Violet.

"Yes, dear, I knew it was coming, only I really couldn't wait for it, because dear Mrs. Craven began proving to us that we were the lost ten tribes, which is absurd on the face of it, considering our noses. I never felt thankful for a tiny, turn-up nose before."

"I often have—at Brighton," interpolated Victoria.

"So I flew off in a hansom—anybody would from the fulfillment of prophecy—and was landed at this hospital. And just on the doorstep was that dear Dr. Warburton."

"The one that came in as an extra when Pat was so ill?" asked Violet.

"Yes; I had quite forgotten how devoted I

was to him. Well, he insisted on taking me round the wards. Wasn't it fun?"

"I always think there are many indications that we are the lost ten tribes," Lady Maidenhead gently murmured, but no one took the slightest notice of her.

"And you can't think what lovely places hospitals are," continued Lady Clementina. "I have quite decided to go into one if ever I am ill. It must be so charming always to have a next-door, or I ought to say next-bed neighbour to talk to."

"Provided you want to talk," remarked Victoria.

"My dear child, of course if you are a woman you always want to talk. And that is what must make being in a hospital such fun."

Merton suddenly remembered Ursula's telling him about a poor woman whom she had been to visit in a hospital, and her face came before him with its tear-veiled eyes as she said, "Oh, Merton! I can never forget it. To see so many lives bound in the prison-house of pain, and yet be unable to make up to them for all that they are missing of the good things of the world." And when he asked her what she had done there she had replied, "The saddest part was that I could

do nothing. I just put my arms round her, and laid my cheek against hers, and longed that she might be comforted."

"And what did you do there, mother?" Violet was asking.

"I saw everything; and the children's ward was simply delightful. Just like a big cage full of twittering birds; and they all chirped, 'Come to me, lidy,' and looked so sweet and clean—much nicer than they would when they were well. I never could bear poor people's children till I saw them to-day."

"But I expect they are happier well, mother," said Violet.

"Oh! they were happy enough to-day—and with lots of lovely toys. I emptied my purse to give them a treat—sponge cake and strawberries for tea, it was going to be."

So Merton perceived that in this gay world there were seen no sad sights. It was a very charming world to live in.

"And I had no money to pay my cab here. But a dear policeman lent me some. I must ask your father to see that he is instantly promoted. And, girls, do remember that, if ever I am ill, I must have Dr. Warburton. It would be such a treat! I should quite enjoy a nice, little, clean,

becoming complaint, with that dear man to look after me."

"I have no patience with doctors and doctoring," observed Colonel Hammond, who had never been ill for a day in his life. "Specialists for this, that, and the other, as if we were not made all of a piece, and ought to be treated wholesale."

"I once consulted a specialist," Victoria told them, "and I was so ashamed of myself."

"Why, my dear?" asked her aunt.

"For disappointing him so. I hadn't a single pain he expected, and it did seem so horribly rude and careless of me. At last he asked in an imploring kind of way if I had not one in my side, and I flew to say yes. But I did not tell him it was owing to a new frock which pinched frightfully. I blessed my dressmaker for the first and only time in my life."

"I forgot to tell you," said Lady Clementina, helping herself to strawberries, "that the policeman actually told me that my husband is speaking. Wasn't it dear and innocent of him? But I know it is one of those dreadfully dull speeches that nobody can listen to—and I am so thirsty!"

"What an awful thing!" exclaimed Victoria. "We came to hear father speak, and we have

forgotten all about it. We have special tickets for the Speaker's Gallery. Come," and she jumped up from the table. "We must fly so as to be in at the death; and you, Mr. Wainwright, must tell us what it was all about afterwards. I wouldn't hurt father's feelings for the world."

So the party broke up, and Violet, from behind the bars of that stuffy little cage upstairs, thought regretfully of the cool, shadowed terrace, and how much nicer it would have been to be strolling up and down it with Merton Wainwright than listening to what she did not in the least understand. But then, as Victoria always said, to make things really pleasant in family life everybody must be interested in what interests each, from a rejuvenated frock to a new cook, and from an unsuitable love-affair to a political speech.

The weeks flew by on fleeter wings than are ever unfolded in the country, and Merton fondly hoped he was becoming a regular man about town. He revolved in the Mandeville orbit, until July had gone and taken them with it out of his reach, and then he began to grow a little towards being the man he had for so long supposed himself to be. The dazzle of such companionship faded from his eyes, but left them

clearer to see something of the world about him. For wholesome laughter sheds a healthy light on many things, and so Merton learned to look at the humorous side of life, and, what was far better for him, at the humorous side of himself. And because the laughter of these merry-minded girls was never really cynical or cruel, he expanded in its sunshine, and once or twice even laughed with them at his own theories and conceits. His youthful boasting of his love of and success in work had been slain by a twinkle in Victoria's eyes as he one day was bragging to her about it.

"I felt so old when I left Oxford," he had told her.

"Never mind," she answered soberly, "I remember I did when my hair was turned up. But you will get over it, and feel young again in ten years' time."

And Merton was neither a slow nor a stupid young man; so he learned his lesson quickly, and even felt a little younger before ten weeks had passed.

CHAPTER VII

AN AMATEUR CONCERT

"I DON'T care; I shan't sing at all unless I have that solo!" said Gladys Wainwright shrilly.

"Don't be a goose!" reproved her elder sister in a matronly voice; for it was now autumn and Gertrude was glorying in the proud position of being Mrs. Albert Cox, and so could afford to look down from a great height of superiority on to the follies and foibles of unmarried girls.

"It is just Beatrice Holt's spite," continued the aggrieved Gladys, "when she knows that nobody can reach the top A but me."

"And you don't always, you know," replied her sister candidly.

"I do. At least I get nearer to it than any one else can. That's just like you, Gertrude, taking everybody's part against me. But I tell you I won't appear at all unless I sing that."

"Oh, yes! you will. You know you will. Why, you have got a new dress for the occasion. It is very becoming, mamma says."

Gladys looked mollified. "Yellow's my colour, there is no doubt, and papa let me have this piece cost price."

"He is too generous with things for the house," said Gertrude; "Albert was only saying so yesterday."

"Then Albert had better hold his tongue," remarked Albert's sister-in-law emphatically. "It is no business of his as long as we are at the head of the concern."

"Indeed I don't know how papa would get on without Albert," continued his wife in a satisfied voice. "I am always so thankful he has him to lean upon."

"Pack of nonsense!" exclaimed Gladys irritably; "papa's not the one to want any one to lean on, I can tell you. And Albert will take a precious lot too much upon himself if he thinks he is going to run the whole show. You're such a sawney over Albert, you never can see which way the wind blows."

"You should try to control your temper a little more, Gladys; you really should. It will go dreadfully against your settling, for there is nothing a man hates so much as a nasty temper. I am always so thankful for my amiable one."

"Well, you were long enough about finding a

husband for all your sweetness," sneered her sister.

"You make a grand mistake, my dear. Of course it took me a long while to finally make up my mind that Albert would suit me, and to put aside even better chances for him," said Gertrude, completely forgetting her confidences to Ursula of not so very long ago! Indeed, she had accustomed herself to believe that it was with the greatest difficulty that Mr. Cox had succeeded in winning her, and that she had finally singled him out from a crowd of aspiring suitors. Things often assume a different hue when seen through the light of subsequent events.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Gladys. "Didn't look much like it at the time!"

"I am extremely happy," continued Mrs. Albert placidly; "and everything seems to have turned out for the best. Indeed, even cook's giving notice the other day has provided me with the chance of engaging the kitchen-maid from Rennel Hill, who has got into Mrs. Lyall's genteel ways. And she must know about nice gravies, seeing that Mrs. Lyall's father was a Sir Somebody, and so would be extra particular by birth. And Albert thinks a lot of his gravies.

That is cook's one fault—they are a little sloppy. But I just look round, and pop in a drop of Harvey's or Worcester if they don't seem tasty."

"I can't bear messing in a kitchen," said Gladys, "and when I am married I shall just stick to the front rooms."

"When you are married you will know better than talk such nonsense. Two servants can't do everything, and it takes a good deal to afford more."

"The wives of professional men live in a very different way," observed Gladys loftily.

"I am not so sure of that. But for myself I prefer our way," and Gertrude stroked herself mentally and purred on. "I think two servants is a perfect number—just enough to give you something to do, and yet keeping all the heavy work in hand themselves. And I have been wonderfully fortunate in servants since my marriage."

"Well, I am sick of hearing of your good fortune, Gertrude. I wish you'd take a little interest in other people's concerns."

"So I do. And of course every one cannot expect to be so well-off all round as I am. There is only one Albert in the world." Which for the sake of the world was perhaps fortunate.

"What do you think of Bernard Holt?" asked Gladys suddenly, with rather red cheeks.

"The brother from London, you mean?"

"Yes, the professional man. The rest of the family are all in trade, you know, but Bernard was always above that, his sisters told me."

"As if trade wasn't as good as profession, any day," exclaimed Gertrude with more warmth than usual. "But I expect the fact was Bernard hadn't the capital to set up on his own account, which they would hardly like to own to."

"Bernard lives in a most genteel part of London," continued Gladys with her nose in the air, "and has a first-rate connection."

"He is a dentist, isn't he?"

"Yes, and the senior partner has a lot to do with the teeth of the aristocracy, which of course Bernard will succeed to."

"He always seems to me to be rather a slow young man."

"There is nothing at all loud about Bernard."

"For myself," continued Gertrude, "I like some one with a bit more go—Albert's liveliness is so cheerful in everyday life; but then, as I said before, every one can't be like him."

"I fancy," began Gladys—"of course it may be only a fancy, but I have a feeling that Ber-

nard's a bit gone on me. What do you think, Gerty ?"

"I didn't notice anything myself;" but then seeing her sister's face fall, she added kindly, "but Bernard's one of the deep ones, I should say. He is still enough to run deep, in all conscience, for I never met such a mummy of a man before." And the young matron laughed her comfortable, chuckling laugh, which Gladys found particularly annoying.

"The frock-coat he wore on Sunday has quite the London cut," she boasted proudly. "So different from Albert's slop one, I thought to myself."

Gertrude's wifely feathers ruffled quickly.

"I don't care for such pronounced Sunday clothes in a man, and Albert knows it is much grander to look as if you hadn't been to church, so he chose the check suit on purpose. Why, I have never even seen Merton's frock-coat. He always wears blue serge on Sundays here, and he used to go to the most fashionable tailor in Oxford, so he must know best."

"Mamma thought Bernard looked something beautiful," persisted Gladys.

"Oh, but then mamma is very old-fashioned, you know, dear, and likes people to look re-

ligious," and Gertrude smiled indulgently. "I perfer a bit of style myself, and Albert carries a check to perfection."

"It is always well to be prepared," mused Gladys vaguely, "and Bernard is coming down for the concert."

"So is Merton, I hear. It will be quite an excitement in Winstow. It is so fortunate this house of ours lies so close to the concert hall, for what with rehearsals and such like the folks will be glad to drop in for a mouthful; and I never tasted such drop-cakes anywhere as on my own table. I am turning it over in my mind whether I won't give a supper party on the evening itself."

"You might ask the Holts and one or two others," suggested her sister eagerly.

"A couple of roast fowls are very tasty for supper. And Farmer Preece always keeps his best birds for me. Indeed I seem quite a favourite with him and the butcher, so I get all the titbits. I often notice how much tenderer our meat is than what you get at home."

"Perhaps you are a favourite with the cows and sheep, too," remarked Gladys with fine scorn, but her sister's self-satisfaction was impervious to such thrusts.

The preparations for the concert continued with the usual amount of jealousy and heart-burnings which an amateur entertainment occasions. The performers all stated that they were perfectly willing to do anything except the one thing which had been assigned to them, and so it was with no little difficulty that matters were finally arranged without an open quarrel. As Ursula was not musical, and could do nothing in the way of making a conventional noise, she was out of all this intricate wear and tear. Indeed to her the concert afforded only thoughts of pure pleasure. She had so little authorised enjoyment in her life that she retained capabilities of deriving more delight from an occasional treat than happier girls could possibly experience. And was not Merton coming down from Friday to Monday, and bringing a large share of her enjoyment with him? For it was now a long time since she had seen her old friend. He had been obliged to stay in London all during the long summer holidays, which come close on the season's heels, and because he had found them rather dull after the departure of the Mandevilles he had written longer letters to Ursula, and drawn nearer to her in the telling of all the interests and events with which life in London is

so crowded. Most of us have one such letter to write every week, and it makes a little garden in our souls wherein we plant all the varied thoughts and moods and feelings which are too small and insignificant, and sometimes too sacred, to show to the world outside. It is a close comradeship, this one of confidential letter-writing, closer for not being hampered by tricks of manner and touches of shyness and reserve; and it is a good possession to hold, seeing that understanding sympathy is one of the best gifts this world, or even the next, will be able to give us, and our pens can sometimes win it more readily than our tongues. So Ursula looked forward to the meeting with a new tenderness, and Merton looked forward to it, too. For half the pleasure of pleasure is the person to whom we want to tell all about it, and Merton had much to tell which no one but Ursula would really understand.

"May we both come up to see you?" she asked Mrs. Lyall, to whom she had been telling the wonderful story of his success. "He is quite different from all his people, you know."

The old lady smiled at the girl's eagerness. She had built up a romance in her thoughts about Ursula and this young man; and she saw,

with eyes sharpened by long experience, how the old friendliness was taking a different shape in Ursula's heart, though the girl herself was still unconscious of it.

"Come to tea on Saturday, my dear. I shall always have a warm welcome waiting for any friend of yours. For during these past few months that we have been thrown so much together you have crept very close to my heart, my child. There is always an empty space in a daughterless household, for the girls have dear, bright ways of their own which nobody else can replace. Once long ago a little daughter peeped into my home, and though she went away again before any one but her mother had learned to love her, she left an empty place which has never been filled up." And Mrs. Lyall's sweet face saddened.

"I am so sorry," said Ursula.

"But when you came," continued the old lady, "you brought a fragment of that dear daughterhood which I have missed all my life; and it has been refreshing to me to hear your girlish voice and laughter, and to see you in and out of my rooms. And you have been so good to the children. I am very grateful to you, Ursula."

"Oh! but, Mrs. Lyall, the gratitude is all on my side. I can't say what I feel, without being silly and crying, but think what it has been to me to go out as a governess and to enter a new home. For Rennel Hill will always seem like a home to me because so many of my deeper thoughts and feelings have been born here."

"I wish, little girl, that I could see you safely guided into a haven of rest and joy. I pray that I may before the time comes to wish you good-bye. I often think, Ursula, how infinitely great God's love to us must be, seeing that He can let us suffer so."

"I don't understand," interrupted the girl; "it seems as if it must be just the other way."

"Listen, dear. There is a stage of love which is indulgent, perhaps cheaply so. Just to give pleasure is enough to satisfy it. But there is a stage as far above that as it is beyond—when love can bear to hurt because of its greatness, and, though sharing the sorrow, cannot withhold the suffering because of the deeper, truer meaning of it all."

"I cannot grasp that—yet," said Ursula.

"Once, when I was very ill, a friend came up to see me, and she gave me a bunch of grapes and said how sorry she was I was worse, and she

hoped I should be better soon; and then she hurried away with a smile, to be in time for a party to which she was engaged. And directly afterwards a great doctor came, and he threw the grapes away with a frown, and took me into his skillful hands, and oh! how he hurt me, Ursula. And he stayed with me all through a black night of anguish and fought the foe which had hold of me step by step, and I can see the deep lines with which anxiety furrowed his face even now, and hear the strained tension of his voice as he spoke to the nurses. But he won the battle for me, Ursula, and saved me, even though my life was only dear to him as a case. Think how infinitely more worth saving are our true lives in the sight of God, to whom they were dear enough to be bought by such a ransom."

Ursula was silent, for thoughts such as these were too hard for her to realise. She had a feeling deep down in her childish heart that if God really cared He would be kinder to her, and give her the bright-coloured gifts which we want so badly in the days of our youth; and, unexpressed even in the thought, the feeling grew that, as she was crowded out of so much which other girls enjoyed, so she was also perhaps crowded out of the divine tenderness and care.

Ursula was very young in soul and ignorant of life in those days.

"Why is you goin' afore dinner?" asked Dubby; for Ursula had begged for leave to help in the decoration of the concert room that afternoon.

"Because I want to take the flowers your grandmother has given me and arrange them round the platform."

"Is you ascited?" the child wanted to know.

"Yes," laughed Ursula, thinking of the five o'clock train which was to bring Merton from London.

"I am learning my hymn awful quick," Dick announced.

"I don't like Dick's hymns," announced the little girl, who was in a very conversational mood. "I like my own favourite best."

"And what is that, dear?"

"*When Mother's a Sailor.* The one you teached me yesterday."

Ursula was puzzled for a moment, until she remembered that it was the old children's hymn beginning "When mothers of Salem," which she had been trying to drive into Dubby's little round head.

"Mother isn't one yet," the child explained thoughtfully, "but daddy's a soldier," she added more cheerfully.

"Yes, I know," replied Ursula with a smile; "but now, Dubby, do go on with your reading. It is getting late."

"L-e-t—let; u-s—us; g-o—go; o-u-t—— I don't know."

"Now, what does o-u-t spell?" asked Ursula coaxingly.

"I don't know," replied Dubby cheerfully.

"Oh, yes, you do. I told you yesterday."

"I don't know," still more cheerfully.

"If I tell you again, will you remember?"

Dubby's face brightened up. "I don't know," she repeated gaily.

"Look here, Dubby," suggested Ursula, trying to hurry on the appointed task, "let us pretend that you are a very big, clever girl at a boarding school."

"Oh, no, let's p'etend I'm a little tiny one, what doesn't learn no lessons—like a weeny baby in a cradle."

"Miss Grey," said Dick, looking up from his hymn-book, "I suppose Herod angels are rather wicked ones, same as King Herod was?"

"Oh, Dick! look at the word. It is 'herald,'

not 'Herod.' And angels are always good, and come with joyful messages."

"How quick do they come?" Dubby wished to know.

"Very quickly," replied Ursula vaguely.

"I can run as quick as angels," boasted Dick.

"Oh, Dick! How rude!" reproved his little sister severely.

"What messages do angels bring us?" asked the boy.

"The ones you are learning about brought us the message of God's love."

"God loves us all very much," continued Dick. "Mummy told me so all that long time away in India."

Dubby's merry face suddenly sobered, and she looked up at Ursula wistfully.

"Does God love me enough to say 'darling'?" she asked in her baby voice.

A lump rose in Ursula's throat, and she lifted the child on to her knee.

"I think He would always call you 'darling,'" she said softly. And Dubby's little face flushed all over with a new delight.

"I say, Ursula," whispered Gladys Wainwright, as they were arranging the flowers together, "give me a chance with Bernard Holt if

you can keep any of the others back—walking to and from Gertrude's and that kind of thing. You understand?" And she gave a knowing look.

"Of course I understand how much nicer it is to have people to ourselves. I wonder why it is?" mused Ursula.

"What a silly you are. How can you carry on with a third person bothering round?"

"But with everybody it is nicer," persisted Ursula, "when there is no idea of what you call 'carrying on.'"

"Now, girls, hurry up!" cried Mrs. Albert Cox as she bustled by, "and remember that supper will be ready directly the concert is over. Albert will be hungry, I know, by then."

When Ursula first saw Merton that night she thought how much older and more manly he looked. His moustache had grown dark and heavy, and there was a new stylish stamp about him that she had never noticed before. He wore an orthodox London florist's buttonhole, and for long afterwards the scent of tuberoses brought her the sense of Merton's nearness.

"Do you still like London?" she whispered between the songs.

"More than ever! I have heaps to tell you.

The Mandevilles are awfully nice to me, and I go out a great deal. But, Ursula, I do so often wish you were there, too."

"Do you really, Merton?"

"Yes, because, you see, I have to always be on my best behaviour up there, and it would be so jolly if I had you to talk to quite naturally and all that. The girls there aren't like you."

"Are you sure they are not much nicer?" she asked with a smile on her lips, but a little shivery feeling at her heart.

"Oh, they are nice in such a different way. They talk and laugh all the time—much more than I ever expected as regards laughing and making jokes—but I couldn't confide in them, you know, as I do in you. They'd make fun of me. For they don't really think much of people who aren't one of themselves, even though they are so jolly to you and make you feel you are. But, when you get home again, somehow by yourself you know it was only 'pretending,' as the children say."

"But you will make for yourself a right some day, Merton, and be one of themselves. 'With a great sum you will obtain that freedom,'" she quoted smiling.

"But they are free-born," he added quickly.

"I know the difference now, Ursula, better than I did; but what you say is true. I think I may some day win that freedom."

"I am sure you will."

"What a help and comforter you always are!" and his dark eyes glowed with affection. "But it's a bit of strain, you know."

"I think a strain is rather good for you, Merton. Do you know there is something bigger and finer about you now because you have been living up to a strain? I can see it. You are more of a man already."

"I feel ever so much older—and not quite so sure of myself, between ourselves," he added in a lower voice. "It is splendid training being under Mr. Mandeville!" But it was being under the Mandeville girls that was the best training that Merton was having just then.

"I am glad you are being trained, Merton, because I am, too. It is equally good training being under Mrs. Lyall."

"But you don't seem older, Ursula." And he looked at her with a quizzical smile. "You seem younger, so your training must be the other way about."

"I think I feel younger, too." And the girl's

eyes shone with the dawning joy of what life might have in store for her after all.

"You have learned some new little tricks, I notice," he continued confidentially.

"So have you," she retorted.

"Don't interrupt. I like the new way you do your hair and the bunch of flowers in your belt. You never used to wear flowers before."

"Mrs. Lyall taught me to. She says that the thought of a girl and flowers ought to be all mixed up. And that you must never be too busy, however hard-worked, to think about making yourself attractive, because that is one of woman's duties in the world—to make it more beautiful."

"She is right. Oh, I say, must I be quiet while this johnny is reminding us of the premature decease of the minstrel boy?"

"Yes," laughed Ursula. "It is young Holt. He has rather a good voice."

"How well Gladys is looking to-night," continued Merton, catching that light in his sister's face which is a beautifier of the most commonplace countenance, when first it is softened by the refining touch of love for another. "She has improved lately, as much as Gertrude has gone off."

"I think it is because she is falling in love," whispered Ursula.

"I think it is because she is wearing a decent frock. Clothes make an awful difference in people's looks. There is a Miss Langbridge in town, who, Victoria Mandeville says, is exactly like fried whitebait in the face, and yet she passes as almost pretty till you look into her, and see that she is really an old fright. It is dress that does it," he concluded grandiloquently.

Ursula looked up impressed. Merton was certainly much wiser and could teach her many things. And he was quick to read the admiration in her eyes and liked it. For of late nobody had admired Merton; he had been busy admiring other people—a much more profitable if not quite so pleasant pastime.

"What a handsome man young Wainwright has become," said Georgina Carpenter to her brother as most people stood up and looked around during the interval. "But Ursula should know better than flirt with him like that."

David frowned. "He always was good-looking," he answered shortly.

"It would be a rare catch for Ursula," mused Georgina.

Her brother somewhat roughly pushed past

the next few chairs and went up to the door. And from there he watched Ursula and saw the new brightness that shone in her eyes and the happy smile that played round her usually pathetic mouth. The faint sound of her girlish laughter, as Merton spoke to her, fell on his sharpened ear, and a big sigh was stifled in his throat.

"He has everything," he thought to himself, "beauty and brains, and what is far better, youth and hope. And the boy deserves it, nearly all. He could not quite, because we none of us can deserve the really big gifts. Oh, Merton!" and the sigh escaped after all, "I wish I could change places with you!" And then he saw the young man rise and come elbowing his way down the room to where he stood.

"Good-evening, sir," and he spoke in the old boyish way in spite of his grand young man appearance. David shook his hand heartily.

"What a swell you are, old man."

Merton laughed—that pleasant, ringing laugh of his. "I am awfully glad to see you again. It is like old times, sir."

David shook his head. "The old times are gone by, Wainwright. See that the new ones are as good."

"A jolly lot better, I should say. I am getting on first-rate up there. But," he added impulsively, "I feel it is all owing to you. I never could have done all this if you hadn't given me the start."

"Nonsense," and David smiled grimly.

"And I know you wish me good luck from your heart," added Merton.

David spoke very slowly. "Yes, I do, my boy," and nobody ever knew how much it cost him to make that answer. For David was not a man to speak insincerely, and he meant even to the bitter depths all that such a wish implied.

Mrs. Albert Cox was terribly hot and flustered by the arrangement of her supper party. She was so anxious to show forth at it all her household treasures, independently of their suitability. Handsome electro covers brooded over the two main dishes, which an artificial butler, engaged from the Fairfax Arms, was somewhat slow to remove—Gertrude having previously instructed him not to hurry, so that their magnificence might first be fully appreciated. A couple of roast fowls serenely sat on each of the aforesaid dishes.

"What a rum mistake!" said Merton in a low

voice to Ursula. "I never saw such a covey of roast fowls in my life before."

"Hullo, my dear!" exclaimed Mr. Wainwright in strident tones; "got the whole poultry-yard cooked, I see."

Gertrude beamed with pride.

"I always think, when there are two different things," she explained, that it is so disappointing for those who have to take plain joint. So I said we would all fare alike to-night, and nobody should regret their choice. You will find the sausages in that revolving bacon dish, papa. I felt I must have it on the table, though bacon itself is a little dull when compared with sausages. Do you mind lifting the cover, Mr. Holt?"

"Not at all," he answered solemnly.

"It is a handsome dish, is it not?" Gertrude always said "Is it not?" at a party. "It was a wedding present from Albert's great-aunt. Solid silver, you know."

"Indeed," murmured Bernard.

"I do like to see a bit of silver on a table myself," she continued, "and we have been very fortunate in having so much given to us. Of course there was a little electro among it from those who were not quite so well off, but it chiefly is solid."

"Ursula," whispered Merton, "do look. A teapot is being handed round. What can be in it?"

"Oh! my dear," chimed in Mrs. Wainwright, who sat next to him and overheard, "that was my suggestion. Gerty was so anxious to show off the teapot, and we could neither think how it could be managed, seeing that Albert was set on spirits and water as being the correct thing for supper, when suddenly it struck me how well it would do for the gravy, for Gerty's sauce-boats are only china to match the dinner service, and the one is a bit cracked. So this idea of mine came in quite providentially, as it were, for only yesterday cook found the cracked one did run out, and there was no time to get another."

"Well, it is original, mother, if nothing else."

"I dare say it doesn't any of it seem very grand to you, my dear, accustomed as you are to such fine ways in London, and even silver vegetable dishes no doubt. But we must all try and admire each other's things a bit, mustn't we, Ursula? Just to make everything pleasant and cheerful."

"And there are things to admire almost everywhere," assented the girl—"that is, if, as Mrs. Lyall says, we look deep enough."

"To be sure, love. What a beautiful way of putting things Mrs. Lyall seems to have. She is wonderfully religious for a high-born lady, I have always heard. Merton, my dear, I wish you would not smile quite in that way when Gerty speaks; she might take it as a little bit scornful."

"I don't think she would, mother," and herein the young man was right. Gertrude Cox was incapable of seeing that any one could laugh at her; and, besides, in her opinion "solid silver" was too sacred a subject for a jest.

"I could not think how it was," continued Mrs. Wainwright, "but ever since we sat down I have been reminded somehow of a funeral, and I have only just found out that it is the smell of your buttonhole, my dear. Why ever did you choose such flowers, Merton? They quite bring back to me Cousin Sophia's death. She had a very stylish funeral, being the wife of an officer in the army."

Merton took out his buttonhole and tossed it into the fire behind them.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed his mother, "you should not act so rashly. It seems such a waste to burn a beautiful nosegay like that."

"But he didn't want you to be reminded of

sad things, Mrs. Wainwright," Ursula explained.

"Between ourselves, love"—and the good lady's voice sank into a confidential whisper—"Cousin Sophia was no loss to me. Indeed after her marriage she quite gave me and papa the pass-by, and many's the time I have felt a bit hurt in consequence. Not that it does to worry over such things, but it seems to me a little late in the day when the first invitation you get from a person is to their funeral."

"Then she was a horrid old cat," said Merton, who hated to feel that his mother had been pained.

"Oh, my dear! you must not speak like that, and she an angel in glory! For Cousin Sophia, I am glad to say, did not give up religion along with her humble relations, which she might have done, seeing the temptations there are in high society."

"But I am not going to forgive any one who has been unkind to you, mother. No more will Ursula!"

And Merton felt a new thrill of something a little deeper than pleasure in the thought that Ursula would always be good to his mother. Old associations are very strong and deep, and

we slip back into the old thoughts and ways so easily, however high we may have climbed above them. Merton, even though he had only been in Winstow a few hours, was beginning to feel as if he had never been away from it, and the new way of looking at life, which he was picking up so readily in London, fell from him as a cloak at the familiar sound of his mother's voice. That the Mandevilles belonged to a different world from that in which Mrs. Wainwright lived he perfectly well knew, but just at this moment he felt a special tenderness for her, strong with the associations of boyish days, and he was glad that Ursula understood, and that he would never need to hide the homely ways of his mother from her as he would from the new London friends, whose merry scorn, he felt, would scorch some things which to him were sacred in their simplicity.

"You are dear children!" exclaimed Mrs. Wainwright. "And it was just like you, Merton, to burn the flowers sooner than upset me. Only, my love, in future don't do anything which looks extravagant before papa. He might not understand your motives, and get put out a bit, and begin all that long talk about young men's wasting their money, which generally ends in un-

pleasantness all round. And to us old-fashioned folk it does seem a bit lavish to buy buttonholes at a real flower-shop instead of picking them in the garden. Only, of course, we can't enter into all the grand London ways that I know you have to, my dear."

"I don't think I am extravagant, mother; but so many things are necessities which mount up."

"Of course, love. That is what I always say to papa. If we had wanted our boy to live on fifteen shillings a week we went the wrong way about bringing him up to it when we kept him so long at his schooling, to say nothing of going to Oxford afterwards. But that is where men are a bit unreasonable, as it were. They want the lads to look like gentlemen and yet to cost no more than office boys, which is what I have never found them succeed in yet."

"Of course it is unreasonable," began Merton, but Mrs. Wainwright interrupted him.

"But never mind about that, my dear. It is natural that papa should be a bit contrary at times, what with being a man and the head of the house. So I tell you what I have always told your sisters—if you have anything to say, come to me, and I will watch for a suitable opportunity to mention the matter to papa, which

is what the young folk are a bit thoughtless about doing. Why, only the other day Gladys must needs ask for a new jacket just before dinner, and, of course, being hungry and tired, papa refused, and there was ever such a set-to, which would all have been avoided if only she had asked me first."

"Oh, you put everything all right, mother," and Merton's smile was a very pleasant one. For he saw beneath the homely surface into the dear heart of motherhood, and though he knew with his mind that she was not what the world calls a lady, he felt in his soul that she who was his mother was indeed set apart in his eyes from any such comparisons, and in the greatness of that relationship rose above the smaller criticisms of those outside it. And Ursula drew very near to Merton as she saw that this spirit of filial affection was still untarnished and unspoiled. Her friendship with Mrs. Lyall had taught her that good breeding should go below good manners right into the heart of things, and she recognised that Merton's attitude in this respect was thoroughly well-bred. Perhaps the young man never climbed quite so high as he did during that first visit home after his new experiences. The sweet welcome which Winstow

had for him warmed his heart, and the guileless admiration of the good people there gave him a restful feeling such as was impossible in the Mandevilles' set. The social atmosphere of London had braced him with its clear, sharp cold, but it had not chilled his finer feelings—yet. He knew a little more of the wide world, and so realised how small a bit of it is to be found at Oxford, which he used to think encompassed both earth and the prescribed portion of heaven it still leniently sanctioned. Moreover, at Winstow it was his real self that Merton dared to show—a slightly boastful and priggish self, but one that rang true on the whole, having fine hopes and high ideals of the importance of his particular presence in the world, and the work he meant to do there, and a touch of boyish enthusiasm which "showed off" in a simple fashion and left his nature free from the cramp of caution regarding all he said and did.

On the following day he and Ursula walked up to Rennel Hill. They chose the most roundabout way, through the lanes that led down to the water first, and from there wound up to the Chase, and they wandered among the gorse and bracken until it was time for Mrs. Lyall's tea! Such a lovely autumn afternoon it was. The

woods were all crimson and gold in the afternoon sun, and the browned hedgerows were half-covered with big bunches of red berries, and wonderful little russet garlands that trailed over them down on to the ground. As yet no taste of damp or touch of haze tarnished the burning brightness of the country side that day. Cheerful little rabbits popped in and out of the furze bushes as the young couple walked by, and bunches of blackberries tempted them to continually stop and taste the big ripe fruit.

"Isn't it lovely and brown?" exclaimed Ursula, stopping to catch the fragrant breath of the moorland as they reached the summit of the hill.

"It is like a picture reflected in copper," suggested Merton. "But never mind the view, Ursula; I want to tell you about such heaps of things."

"And I want to hear everything you have to tell," exclaimed the girl readily. "Nothing has ever interested me half so much."

"I get on very well with Mr. Mandeville. He is rather impatient if you don't grasp things at once, but I am learning to do that pretty well. And then Lady Clementina and her daughters are so jolly to me, and are always asking me there."

"And do you like them very much, Merton?"

"Rather!"

"Better than the country people at home?" And a tone of sadness touched her voice.

"Oh, in such a different way! You have no idea how amusing such girls are. It is just like going to an entertainment hearing them talk. But it's rather a strain, all the same, being with them. I'm happier here, Ursula, with you," and he looked down at her with a frank affection.

"Are you?" she said simply, but a smile of pure joy was lighted in her eyes.

"London society is like one long dress rehearsal," continued Merton confidentially; "and you musn't fail in your part, or else ——"

"What? Tell me," as he hesitated.

"Oh! only you wouldn't be asked again. But it is one of the rules of the game up there that you should earn your dinner, or your entertainment, or whatever you are invited to."

"It seems to me a fair rule," said Ursula thoughtfully.

"Of course it is. Only, you see, I have had it all to learn. And I used to think that going into society was just for the sake of enjoying oneself, and there would be no price to pay."

"But I like things to cost something. We

value them more ourselves, and they are more worthy of a place in life. Don't you think so, Merton?"

"I suppose so—only, you see, I have always bought things so easily before. I have never felt the fear of failing till now."

And Merton was infinitely the better for such a fear. It prevented his confidence from hardening into self-satisfaction. But it touched Ursula with a quick sympathy, and she laid her hand half-tenderly upon his sleeve.

"You won't ever fail, Merton," she said proudly. "I don't think you could if you tried."

And he was comforted, as he used to be in the old boyish days, by Ursula's loyal admiration.

"I feel rather out of it sometimes with the men I meet at the Mandevilles'," he continued, "and yet they aren't really half as clever as I am. But, Ursula, the kind of cleverness I have doesn't count much, and they'd laugh at my love of work."

"I should not care if they did," and her eyes flashed. "There is nothing to be ashamed of, and it is a great power to possess."

"I used to think it was," replied the young man slowly; "and once I told Miss Mandeville how I could forget pain and anxiety over my

books, and she laughed and said I sounded like an advertisement of Sunlight Soap or patent pills. I felt an awful fool."

"Oh, Merton!" exclaimed Ursula, "I wish I were fonder of books. They never make me forget pain."

But it was not that Merton's love of literature was so much greater than Ursula's, but his suffering so infinitely less.

"But," she continued, "it was horrid of that Miss Mandeville to make fun of such a thing. I don't like jokes that hurt other people." For Ursula did not see, as Victoria did, of what inestimable benefit it was to Merton to be thus hurt.

"So now I pretend it is all a bore. But, Ursula, the dear part of being with you is that there is no pretending. I can say everything just as I think, and you never laugh at a fellow, or make him feel an ass."

Merton forgot that not so very long ago he had blamed Ursula in his heart for not laughing at things and people more. But he was just a little sore now with the rubs and brushings of the London world, which showed him his place so ruthlessly, and gave him to understand that he could only hold that on the system of superannuation which exists in some of the public

schools, and insists that unless a boy improves his position, term by term, he shall go elsewhere. Which is precisely the rule in the school of society.

Besides, it was such a beautiful afternoon, with the strange stillness of autumn lying over the golden land; and Ursula's small, pathetic face looked so appealing, and in her grave eyes there was a dumb tenderness which rested Merton after the fencing of sharp tongues and quizzical glances. It was nearly three months since he had seen Violet Mandeville, and the glamour of her presence had faded with the rest of the season's summer sunshine, for Merton always felt the present influence to be the strongest.

"No, you never need pretend with me," she answered slowly; and then with a half-smile, "It would not be any use, either, for I should know which was the real Merton, and knowing, always understand."

"I believe you would, Ursula. It makes a fellow believe in everything that's good to have a girl like you to talk to," and his voice softened. "I had almost forgotten," he added candidly, "in the rush and whirl up there, how good and dear you are."

"I am not good," said Ursula, shaking her

head; "but you won't forget again, will you, Merton?"

And then they both laughed softly—so softly that a little rabbit close by, just ready to run to his hole, stopped for a moment's thought, and decided that two people who seemed so gentle and so kind could surely not be on destruction bent. And he was right, for neither Ursula nor Merton noticed how near the little creature was, for they were looking into each other's eyes, and through those windows into the world beyond.

"Oh, Miss Grey!" shrieked Dubby, flying down the road as fast as her fat legs were able, as soon as she saw them turning round the corner of the winding lane. "I's so glad you've comed to tea, and brought a man what can play with Dick."

"You are provided for, you see," said Ursula with a laugh. And then to the little girl, "But why are not you playing with Dick?"

"'Cause something's happened"—and Dubby's eager face grew serious—"what's made us took no notice of each other all the rest of to-day."

"Tell us about it," begged Ursula.

"You see, it was like this," Dubby explained solemnly—"Dick did something very horrid to me."

"And what was that?" asked Merton.

"I forget 'zactly, 'cause it was yesterday, but it was dreadful horrid, I know. And I had a beautiful paper lady all dressed in satin and pearls, and we made the arrangement when Dick wanted it that he might have it, on'y if I wanted it any time back I could have it, you see."

"That was a very good plan," observed Ursula.

"But," added Dubby sadly, "we made no arrangement if we both wanted it together, and that's how the horridness happened when we did."

"It was a probable contingency from the first," said Merton.

"'Twasn't," contradicted Dubby with scorn; and then, not deigning to notice any more unintelligible remarks, she continued to Ursula, "And Dick was out driving with grannie, and it came into my head that I would stick a hairpin through the paper lady which was asleep in Dick's cupboard. And I did, and made her all spoiled. And when Dick came back he was awful angry."

"I am afraid it was quite a quarrel," said Ursula gravely.

"It was, quite. And Dick keeps on whistling, and saying paper ladies is only girls' play, and he's very glad the best one is all spoiled. On'y I aren't," and big tears filled Dubby's eyes.

"It was a pity altogether, but don't cry, dear. We will make another paper lady, and paint her lovely colours, and give her to Dick to make up."

"And another for me, to make up, too," suggested Dubby, with a sudden outburst of cheerfulness, kicking the rich red leaves which carpeted the drive in clouds before her.

"So you know Clementina Mandeville!" exclaimed Mrs. Lyall, after they had finished tea in the long, low drawing-room, and were watching the crimson sunset from the terrace wall. "It is so many years since I saw her. Her mother, the Dowager Lady Maidenhead, is a dear friend of mine."

"She is dead now," said Merton.

"But none the less my friend, I hope," and Mrs. Lyall smiled. "What a merry girl Clementina used to be!"

"She is merry still," and Merton laughed, "and very girlish. She doesn't seem as old as her eldest daughter now."

"Her mother used to say that Clementina never would take life seriously, or anything in it."

"Then she was about right, Mrs. Lyall. For I should think it was too late for Lady Clementina to begin now."

"People seem to me to have a special age of their own," said Ursula—"one that fits in with their characters, and is really their souls' age independently of years. I never could imagine Georgina Carpenter to be anything but forty-five; and I don't believe she ever was."

"By that estimate, then, Clementina Mandeville will be nineteen until she dies," observed Mrs. Lyall; "but I like your idea, Ursula. There is truth inside it, seeing that we ourselves are not the slaves of time, but the children of eternity."

"What age is Ursula in character?" Merton asked the old lady, after a moment's pause.

"I should say thirteen," answered Mrs. Lyall with a smile. "A little, sad, hard-worked, thirteen-year-old child, with a great store of motherliness for her broken dolls, and a longing to be good and wise and clever in some difficult, dangerous way which she cannot in the least understand. Am I right, dear?" and she laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"I don't know. I should have thought much more. I feel so old sometimes."

"So does the sad-eyed little girl, I fancy, when the dolls are cracked and the lessons hard and the frocks torn. Oh! my dear," and the old

lady put her arm round Ursula's slender waist, "I feel you are such a child to know what work and pain even mean. But hard experience has come to you very early. May brighter days be in store," and here she glanced at Merton, whose face was puzzled with the new sympathy for his old playmate which Mrs. Lyall's words kindled, "and may you soon feel younger because you are really older in the realisation of fuller happiness."

The girl looked with tear-filled eyes away down the river through the film of the low-lying mist. Any words of kindness or care for her touched Ursula so readily, and appealed to her so powerfully.

"Don't you think she is looking stronger," Mrs. Lyall was asking Merton, "since I have had her at Rennel Hill?"

"I thought she was always pretty strong," he answered, "but she looks nicer somehow. I told you so last night, didn't I, Ursula?"

"It was your bunch of flowers in my belt," and Ursula smiled at Mrs. Lyall. But the old lady's face was rather sad. "He is not half good enough for Ursula," she was thinking to herself, "in spite of his handsome face and capable brain. He is selfish, and he would soon wear

out my little girl. But it is no use interfering, for nobody is wise or understanding enough to interfere, except God. Only I want her to be so happy."

"I've learned all my lessons," announced Dick, suddenly appearing through the morning-room window, and then he looked up gravely into Merton's face.

"Would you excuse me if I asked your name?" he said politely. And when the young man told him, he observed thoughtfully, "It sounds as if I had read it somewhere printed. Would it be in history, do you think?"

"No, geography," replied Merton slightly flushing. "It used to be written over my father's shop in Winstow."

Dick was delighted at this discovery for a few minutes, and then his thoughts returned to more serious subjects.

"I have been settling, grannie," he began confidingly, "that, perhaps, I won't be a soldier when I'm a man, because I want to be a doctor so badly."

"A doctor, dear?" exclaimed the old lady.

"Well, you see, Mr. Carpenter says I can't be a soldier if I don't do mathematics quicker; and I never can. But being a doctor is so easy,

'cause I remember what that one in London said to me, and it was only things I can say by myself now. But you gave him his fare for it, didn't you, grannie?"

Mrs. Lyall looked shocked, but Ursula came to the rescue. "Doctors work very hard, you know, Dick."

"But only at curing people. You just take their hands and look at their tongues and write a letter to the chemist, and then they're better, you see, and you can charge quite ten shillings a day. I thinks it must be awfully jolly and easy to be a doctor. And I do hate sums."

"Where were you going this morning when I met you on your pony?" asked Ursula, seeing that Mrs. Lyall looked somewhat distressed at Dick's sudden fall from the family traditions.

"A long way down to the mouth of the river, where Clay's sister lives. We met a lot of sailors. And, Miss Grey, why do sailors always dress like little boys?"

The old lady smiled.

"Ah! my boy, that is a question the rising generation is forever asking, and we leave them to find out the answer in their turn for themselves."

"Grannie explains things rather difficultly," Dick whispered to Merton.

The walk home was not quite so happy as the one earlier in the afternoon. Perhaps the chill of evening, and its heavy autumn breath, struck a little cold into the young people's hearts, as swathes of damp rolled up from the river and wrapped them round in white, wet folds.

"What did Mrs. Lyall mean about your looking stronger?" asked Merton suddenly. "You are quite well, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," answered Ursula quickly, eager to hide every sign of weakness or pain.

"I am so glad. I don't like delicate girls. But you always seem strong, Ursula."

"I am strong enough," replied the girl lightly, "only every one gets tired sometimes, I suppose."

"Take care of yourself," he said kindly, as he wished her good-night at the garden-gate, "because I should hate to be worried about you when I am away, and I want you to be strong enough to take care of me."

"Do you, Merton, really?" And her eyes shone like stars in the misty moonlight.

"Yes, dear—by and by."

And Merton went home dreaming of how

sweet and restful it would be to be always cared for by Ursula. But she, with throbbing head and racing pulse, lay sleepless through the night, hugging the new happiness and praying with pitiful eagerness that she might always be able to hide her weakness and delicacy, the knowledge of which would so surely come between Merton and his comfort, and so, perhaps, rob her of his springing love.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK KENYON

"GEORGINA," called David from the foot of the stairs, "will you kindly have the little room made ready which is next to mine?"

"What for?" demanded his sister, hurrying down.

"I have a boy coming here as a boarder."

"A boy!" shrieked Georgina. "Have you taken leave of your senses, David?"

"Why does the idea of a boy astonish you so, considering my profession?" he asked half smiling.

"But a boy here will be the most terrible nuisance," she continued irritably, "upsetting the house and never leaving us a minute in peace. Surely you have work enough at the school without bothering yourself with one to look after at home, and what makes you bring a boy here in the middle of the term?"

"The headmaster spoke to me about him. He is a biggish fellow, but he is fearfully nervous in some inexplicable way at nights, and

wakes in a fright, which of course the other boys don't understand and only laugh at him for."

"And serve him right," interrupted Georgina.

"He cannot help it, and it is making him so sensitive that his school work is suffering."

"Cannot help it!" echoed his sister scornfully. "I never heard such nonsense in my life."

"I suppose his nerves are wrong," said David thoughtfully.

"Nerves, indeed! It is perfectly sickening to see the way such folly is pampered nowadays. I would show no mercy on nerves, forsooth. A morbid fancy of that kind will ruin the boy. A good thrashing would settle the matter once for all, in my opinion."

"But not in mine, Georgina. And the boy is in my charge, I must beg you to remember, not in yours."

"Oh, well, David, I suppose you will have your own way, however idiotic a one it may be," she replied huffily.

"Yes, I shall have my own way in this matter," said David quietly. "And I do not wish you ever to speak to Kenyon on the subject."

Georgina sniffed. "It is a pity this precious darling is not at a dame school," she sneered.

"Or else a good thing, if you were to be the dame, Georgina." And her brother smiled to himself.

When David brought the boy home on the following day Georgina's indignation waxed seven times hotter. For Jack Kenyon was one of those big, ungainly boys, who knocked most things over which came within reach of his long legs and arms, and then was much too shy to offer a proper apology. He was ugly and untidy and hid his sensitiveness under an almost sullen exterior—but David Carpenter had not looked into boys' faces and thoughts for so many years without learning to see below the surface, and to find the real boy as he was in self down underneath it all.

"And where are your parents?" Georgina asked him sharply as they sat at tea on the first evening.

"My father is in India," replied Kenyon, blushing furiously.

"And your mother is with him, I suppose?"

"She's dead," he blurted out, splashing the tea with his spoon.

"Take care," snapped Miss Carpenter. "You are not at school now, remember, and so you must mind your manners a little more."

"Have some cake," said David, cutting a huge slice and pushing it towards him.

"Thank you, sir," and the boy went on eating in silence.

"What form are you in?" queried Georgina. Now Jack Kenyon, as most boys, hated to be questioned about his school life. He shuffled uneasily on his chair and almost muttered:

"Upper fifth."

"That is very low for a boy of your size," continued Georgina mercilessly. "I am surprised. You must be far the biggest boy in it."

"Kenyon looks older than he is," said David kindly. "And, besides, he is not very fond of the classics—are you, old man? But you have a power in those finger-tips of yours that will serve you better than the classics some day."

"What do you mean, David?"

"You draw something for Miss Carpenter, Kenyon, or let her see the sketches you showed me. He is going to be an artist some day, Georgina."

"And a poor-paying concern he will find

that. He had far better get on with his lessons and qualify himself for a proper profession."

David Carpenter got up from the table and laid his big hand on the boy's shoulder.

"An artist's is the only profession in the world for such as you, Jack. Stick to your school work like a man, and you will be ready all the sooner to begin your career of art. It is a fine one, but I need not tell you that."

Kenyon smiled a funny, one-sided kind of smile as if he were half ashamed of it, but he looked up gratefully into his master's face.

"Oh, well!" interrupted Georgina, "that may be. But you will have to grow out of all your babyish, fanciful ways before you can think of a career."

"You can go, Kenyon," and David spoke quickly. Then he turned to his sister and his face grew very stern.

"Perhaps I did not make myself clear, Georgina," he said distinctly, "but I will not allow any allusion made in Kenyon's hearing to this nervous weakness of his." And then he followed the boy into the garden.

That night, after Jack had been asleep for a couple of hours, he woke in the deadly fright which sometimes seized him body and mind.

But, instead of lying shivering and sobbing in the cruel silence of being alone, he found his master close at hand. And few people would have recognised the grave, reserved man, had they seen him soothing the boy's terror with an almost womanly tenderness, and holding him with strong arms of protection from the haunting fear, which he was always unable to explain. Jack cried and clung to him in vague distress, and David softly whispered words of comfort, and then gently tried to rouse him from the nervous state, and give him courage and homelike assurance once again. And when at last the boy fell asleep he was holding David's hand with so tight a clasp that it was long before his fingers relaxed their hold. But the man sat patiently waiting, making no movement lest the hush should be broken and the fear aroused before it finally was lulled away; and as he watched the sleeping boy long thoughts stretched out and carried him into a future wherein his work should hold a place, graven as it was on the hearts and minds of the coming generation; but for himself he saw no place, and it never struck him that as a man he had a right to one —a right to stamp his ideal of life upon the future, and then to fight for it with heart and

soul and brain. The great pity and gentleness which need of any kind woke in him lay like a fresh fall of snow over his whole being, and changed the expression of his face as completely as winter's touch changes the appearance of the bare, brown landscape. And in the silent hours which sleep round midnight his thoughts drifted away to Ursula, and he longed to bring into her life the brightness which it hurt him so that she should miss. He saw the little pleading face, as he saw it years ago when she first appeared to him, and the tenderness of his feeling for her welled up as a waveless tide. Then he pictured Merton Wainwright in his light-hearted personality stepping across Ursula's path, and lighting with his flaming torch the happy love which should shine in her sad, deep eyes; and a grim joy swept over him as he felt that it was he who had made Merton in a measure what he was—his hand that had pointed out to the boy the way of success, his influence and training which had made one born of such commonplace stock worthy to stand up and offer the girl he should love so much to make her happy. So in an underlying way it was his own gift to Ursula; and the thought gilded the memory of past years' work, even though it left the present darker and

more drear. He seemed to stand in the deepening night and to look at far-off hills still glowing under the sunset's touch, and was unselfishly able to rejoice in the light which was sweeping over other worlds, even though it left his own one cold and dark.

The next morning Jack Kenyon was clumsier and more shy than ever. He was ashamed to look David in the face, and brought Georgina's wrath in full measure upon him by upsetting his coffee cup in a nervous effort to appear at ease.

"Upon my word, Kenyon, you are a trial!" snapped Miss Carpenter, as the boy ruefully regarded the spreading torrent which an ordinary cup is capable of confining. "If you were my pupil I should box your ears."

David laughed at the consternation on Jack's face.

"What does it matter?" he observed with a masculine indifference to ruined tablecloths.

"That is you all over, David," continued the exasperated lady—"encouraging boys to be tiresome and ungentlemanly. I have no patience with you."

"But it was only an accident, Georgina," replied her brother good-humouredly.

"Only an accident, indeed!" she retorted.

"There is only this or that excuse for everything in your eyes."

"Oh! is there?" exclaimed David drily. "Eh, Jack?" And the boy took courage to look up and return his master's smile.

The advent of Jack Kenyon was an unceasing trial to Georgina, and one in which her friend Mr. Grey sympathised with her most thoroughly.

"I hate boys," he agreed with her fretfully, "and, in my opinion, your brother had no right to bring one into your home, spoiling all your peace and comfort."

Georgina was soothed. "It is just that. David had no right both for his own sake and mine."

"And boys have no business to have nerves," grumbled Mr. Grey, to whom she had confided all about Kenyon; "indeed, in my opinion, your brother is encouraging rather than curing a weakness."

"That is what I say. But David spoils the boy so outrageously that I can do nothing. And a more ill-mannered cub I never saw; but he gets no training from David. Such indulgence perfectly sickens me."

While Georgina Carpenter was pouring out these wrathful opinions to Mr. Grey, Jack Ken-

yon was busily engaged in counterfeiting his French master's report, which had to be shown up to the head master at the close of the lesson, and which, in the event of its proving unfavourable, brought about most distinct trouble. Now Kenyon was despairing of ever gaining a good report, and so an unholy temptation assailed him to make a few copies of some other boy's and show them up instead of his own.

"What are you writing there?" asked David Carpenter, coming by chance into the room.

Jack mumbled so and appeared so uncomfortable that his master grew suspicious and held out his hand for the paper, which he regarded for a moment in silence.

"Look here, old man," he said quietly, "this kind of thing won't do. 'Tisn't right. If you can't win a good report, take your thrashing like a man, and not much harm will be done. But gentlemen don't do mean tricks like this. Here, burn this paper, Jack. I'd rather take my chance of a licking than show it up if I were you, and I believe, when you think about it, that you will, too."

"All right, sir." And Jack held up his head like a man, and tossed the paper into the grate.

It was not long after this that the boy seemed

ailing, and David would not allow him to go down to school.

"There does not seem much the matter with you," grumbled Georgina, who was determined to fight David's scheme of over-indulgence, as she termed it, step by step.

"Oh! I am all right," exclaimed Jack mendaciously.

"So I thought. And what Mr. Carpenter means by keeping you in the house to-day I can't imagine. It is trouble enough to have a boarder, without his being laid up."

"I am very sorry. But Mr. Carpenter said I was to," pleaded the boy.

"You had him up again, I believe, last night?" queried Georgina.

Jack flushed crimson. "I felt awfully bad in the night," he murmured.

"Pack of nonsense! You give way too much, Kenyon. How do you suppose you are ever to grow into a man with such nervous fads and fancies? Mr. Carpenter is very kind to you—much too kind—but you ought not to trouble him."

"He told me to," muttered Jack with a hunted look.

"That is where he spoils and makes a baby of

you," continued Georgina mercilessly, "but have you no consideration for him? Disturbing his night's rest after his hard day's work. He was complaining to me only yesterday of how tired he was. And it vexes him that you should make no effort to improve," she added severely.

"I—I can't help it!"

"Of course you can help it, Kenyon. Don't talk such nonsense to me. People can always help nerves," which was one of Georgina's pet theories, never having had a nerve of her own in her life.

"Oh, here is Ursula Grey coming." And Jack felt that the girl was a very angel of deliverance.

"Father wondered whether you could possibly manage to go down and see him this afternoon?" she came to ask Georgina.

"Of course I could if Kenyon were not at home on my hands," spoke out Miss Carpenter, with fine disregard of the invalid's feelings. "But there is nobody to get his tea, and David said he was not to wait till six o'clock as usual. It is all a ridiculous fuss," she added angrily.

"Never mind about me," and Jack spoke eagerly.

"I will stay and get Kenyon's tea," said Ur-

sula quickly, "if you will explain to father why I am late."

"Very well," replied Georgina decisively, and as if she were conferring the favour. "And mind you behave yourself," she admonished the boy irritably.

"Now we will enjoy ourselves," began Ursula with a smile. "Isn't it a mercy she has gone?"

"She's awful!" observed Jack from the depths of his spirit.

"And you look so tired," continued the girl pityingly. "Never mind. I know she has been bullying you. Here, lie down on the sofa and rest, while I go and discover the tea. I suppose Eliza is out."

When she came back again Jack lay so still and looked so white that she felt full of tenderness for him. The latent motherliness that lies in every true woman's heart beat strong in hers, and it was with a special gentleness that she arranged his cushions and ministered to him in the hundred little ways which a woman's wit suggests.

"Don't try to talk," she spoke softly, "but keep still and think nice thoughts."

Something in his face made her add quickly:

"Perhaps she has driven the nice thoughts

away? Well, never mind. I will run after them and bring them back. Did she bother you?"

Jack nodded.

"What about?"

"Mr. Carpenter."

"Then it isn't true," and the girl's voice rang earnestly; "and you mustn't believe it. She is always giving wrong impressions about him, and has been ever since I was a little girl. I know better than accept them now."

The boy's face lightened. "Then do you think he doesn't really mind having me and—and all that, you know?"

"Of course, I am sure he does not. He always loves having a special boy. Merton Wainwright used to be one of them," and a new sound crept into her voice.

"But he was a different sort of fellow to me. I've heard what a howling swell he was."

Ursula smiled, and there was a dreamy look in her eyes which hushed the boy's unrest.

"Mr. Carpenter has a very high opinion of you, too," she answered gently. "Indeed, I believe he thinks more of your drawing than of all the Latin and Greek which is taught at Winstow."

"And—and, Miss Grey, I'm not shamming to-day—honour bright!"

"I know you are not. I wish you were," and her voice and eyes were full of pity.

"I shouldn't like Mr. Carpenter to know," continued Jack, "'cause I wouldn't now—but I used to sham when I could. I've got an awful, funny, hoarse cough, that means nothing, and I've had the matron on with that often before now."

Ursula stroked the rough hair off his hot forehead, and he smiled lightly at the cool tickling touch of her finger-tips.

"I say," he half whispered, "it's rather cheek of me talking to you like this, but—but I feel so bad I can't help it."

"Poor boy! I understand. I am so glad I came in."

"It's jolly having you!"

"I almost think I could tickle you to sleep," said Ursula, drawing her fingers lightly over his wrist. "Shut your eyes and let me try."

"Thanks awfully," murmured Jack, as the spell began its work and his heavy eyelids fell.

When Ursula heard the click of the gate she crept out softly lest the sleeping boy should be disturbed.

"Oh, Mr. Carpenter!" she whispered, "Kenyon is ill, and your sister does not understand."

"I was afraid of that," and David looked anxious.

"And—you won't mind my saying this," she begged, laying a pleading hand on his sleeve, "but let him feel that he is not a bother to you. I am afraid there has been a little mischief made, and he is such a sensitive boy."

"Thank you," said David simply.

"He is so fond of you," continued the girl with a little smile, "but he is ashamed to show it. I suppose you understand that boys are like that."

"Yes, I understand that kind of thing pretty well."

A few days later, as Ursula was walking home, David Carpenter came up to meet her.

"Will you come in?" he asked. "Kenyon wants you."

"Is he worse?" For she knew that the boy had not been getting better.

"Yes." And there was something in that monosyllable which told Ursula all the truth.

"He thinks that if you were to stroke his wrist again he would fall asleep. We have all been trying, but it seems that nobody knows the right way but you."

"Poor Jack!" exclaimed the girl, and tears dimmed her eyes.

Georgina stood in stony silence as they passed her on the stairs. She was learning a bitter lesson just then—that there was no place for her on that holy ground where love and sympathy stand side by side to meet with death. The boy's restless distress at her appearance, and his pathetic promises that he would get up and go to school to-morrow, would have pierced a harder heart than hers. And the hurt stung her with a sharpness that belongs to self-inflicted wounds. She wanted to do something for Kenyon now, but the truth forced itself into her heart that as we are on the common everydays of life we shall only be able to be at its crises. That what we have written we have written on the lives of those about us, and there is no possibility of beginning a fresh story when the time is spent. To Georgina's arrogance and adamantine opinions this knowledge came with a force that cracks and splits, rather than a warmth which melts and softens, and with a hard, set face she took up the thread of her work, trying to shut the thought of the dying boy upstairs out of her mind.

"That's so nice," said Jack, as Ursula tried to

soothe him. "I believe mother used to do it when I was quite a little chap."

"Yes, dear, I know."

"Your fingers feel like mother's too. When I shut my eyes it seems as if she'd come back."

A sob rose in the girl's throat. The old mother-hunger beat wildly in her heart.

"Miss Grey cannot stay any longer now, Kenyon," exclaimed David after a long silence, "but she will come again if you want her."

Ursula looked up inquiringly, for she wished to stay, but David's look silenced her.

"Good-bye, dear," she said, laying her cheek for a moment against the boy's.

He smiled contentedly and whispered, "I say, would you mind just kissing me once? Thanks, awfully. It is so long since anybody kissed me," he explained to David as the girl left the room. "Only somehow it makes me want to cry," and his lips quivered.

"It is all right, old man; I understand."

"She's got the kind of look that makes a fellow want to cry, hasn't she, sir?"

"Yes, Jack, she has." And perhaps the man and the boy were nearer to each other at that moment than ever before.

"I feel a lot better to-night—not as if I were

a bit ill." Then, catching sight of his master's face, he asked suddenly, "Please, sir, am I very bad?"

"Yes, my boy." And a great compassion rang in David's voice.

"Am I going to die?" and Jack looked startled.

Then David put his big strong arm round the boy and held him close.

"Look here, old man," he said gently; "it is all right. And if God wants you I think He will send your mother to meet you and bring you to Himself."

"Are you sure?" a little tremulously.

"Yes, Jack. I am sure that it will be all right."

"Very well, sir, if you say so. But you'll hold my hand, won't you, until she comes?" And a look of peace swept over his worn face and left a faint smile behind.

"Oh, yes! I won't leave you."

"Thank you, sir. You've been awful good to me. I think I'm tired now and going to sleep. I'm not afraid now I've got your hand. Good-night."

"Good-night, Jack." And David sat long with Kenyon's hand in his, as he had done so

many nights before, though the sleep that he was waiting for now would be a deeper one. And prayers rose from his heart for the fleeting soul, and others followed quick in their train for the dear life left—the girl who had the look, as Jack had said, that "made a fellow want to cry." And big, hot tears welled up in the darkness, more for the living girl than for the dying boy, as David realised for the first time how much more bitter Life may be than its silent sister, Death.

CHAPTER IX

GEORGINA'S MARRIAGE

"AND what does Ursula say about it?" asked David.

"She has not been consulted," replied his sister shortly.

"Do you mean to say that she does not know that you have promised to marry her father?"

"I am sure I cannot tell. I have had something more to think about than a bit of a girl's fads and fancies in undertaking so important a step. And I should imagine that anybody with a grain of intelligence would have seen long enough ago how matters were working out."

"I am afraid Ursula will mind," and David's forehead contracted.

"Mind, indeed! And what if she does? She ought to be only too grateful to me for undertaking all the responsibilities of the household and the care of such an invalid as Frederick Grey. Not that I believe him to be an invalid," she added half to herself; "it is chiefly the result of Ursula's coddling ways. You will see

how much better he is, David, when I am his wife."

Her brother looked puzzled. He did not understand such marriages as Georgina's seemed likely to be—to marry a house and a position, with the man thrown in as an extra. But he said nothing, only drew a sigh for the trouble he knew it would bring into Ursula's life—which was a trouble he fully understood. For Georgina had ruled his home for a long while, and he had felt the weight of her yoke. Moreover his shoulders were stronger than Ursula's, and so he sighed again.

That same day he met Ursula on the river path, which was one of his favourite half-holiday walks. The glories of autumn in that fair, wooded country had faded, but the hillside was crystallised into a new beauty by winter's hoary breath. Christmas had come and gone with mellow winds and mild, soft days, when the brown woods glowed in the yellow sunshine against the blue distances, and the grass looked strangely green. But early in February a bitter frost swept over the country, and even in the west its touch was keen and strong. The powdery snow was blown thin by the searching wind, and lay in scattered patches along the hedge-

rows. The tender blades of the earliest snowdrops somehow found their way through the ironbound earth, but the whiteness of their drooping flowers seemed grey and faded beside the dazzling glitter of the frosted grass. And the heavy morning mist from the river had been caught and fixed in a million icicles, outlining every bough and twig with its delicate pencil of snow, and transforming the whole world into a crystal palace against the bright blue of the unclouded sky. A tingling sense of exhilaration raced through Ursula's veins, colouring her cheeks and giving her a glad lightness of heart which shone in her eyes. David thought he had never seen her looking so happy or so well; and he was dumb with pity for her as he clasped her hand—that tenderest of all pity which hangs over those who are as yet unconscious of the trouble we know is awaiting them, and hurts us, who are deceiving them, with a keener smart than when the blow has actually fallen and they turn to us in open grief.

"Isn't it a lovely day?" exclaimed the girl delightedly. "So lovely that you have to keep saying so."

"Yes," replied David, sickened with the sense of knowing what suffering was in store for her

of which she was ignorant, and feeling a desperate inclination to blurt it out at once before her girlish laughter hurt him any more.

"Winter has been so long in coming," she went on, "I thought there would be no frost and snow at all this year. But I am glad we haven't missed such a day as this. This is the third day of the hoar frost, so to-morrow there ought to be rain."

"There will be, I expect," and David's eyes looked dark with distress.

"Father is so much better lately, and I am so happy in my work at Rennel Hill," and Ursula smiled up at him with a little confiding gesture, "and there are so many nice things to think about," for Ursula's thoughts were generally with Merton in London, and her heart was surely creeping after them. "I was just walking fast, because it is such a nice day altogether, inside as well as out."

"But you mustn't mind if nice days do not last," and then stopped by a sudden sad look in her eyes he hastily added, "I mean when the frost breaks up."

"Of course I shan't mind that," exclaimed the girl in a relieved voice. "And there will be spring coming quite soon now. A February frost is so different from a November one."

"Yes." And then after a pause he continued: "I heard from Jack Kenyon's father yesterday."

"Poor Jack!" said Ursula.

"Poor father!" corrected David quietly. "He has no other son."

"There is a lot of trouble in the world," and Ursula's face sobered.

"But don't you think about it yet, my child," for he hated her to seem saddened, even though he was unhappy just now at her joy. "At least, I mean, I suppose you can't help thinking about what happens. Only don't mind about it much, will you?"

The girl looked surprised. She did not understand David's mood, and why he talked to her so strangely.

"Is anything going to happen?" she asked.

"Oh, no! of course not. Only things are always happening, you know. And it is a pity to bother about them, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose so," doubtfully.

"But I must not keep you," said David hurriedly; "it is cold standing still."

"I am going to call on the Wainwrights," said Ursula, and she smiled again; for there is always a peculiar pleasure in cultivating the friendship of the near kindred of any one in

whom we have a special interest. And he stood watching her with mournful eyes as she almost ran over the crisp, hard ground. It was not often that Ursula's step was so buoyant.

"Well, my dear," and Mrs. Wainwright held the little, cold hand in her big ones, "how well you are looking, to be sure! Is it cod-liver oil you've been trying?"

"No; freedom from worry, I expect. Things have been so much brighter lately."

"It is a surprise that you should take it like that. But I suppose when love, or, I should say, matrimony, is in the air, young folks smell it, and feel cheered as it were. I heard from Merton this morning."

Ursula's thoughts raced off to London, and she forgot the enigmatical portion of his mother's remark.

"I am very much annoyed with Merton," complained his sister Gladys testily. "I specially asked him to call and see Bernard Holt, and he says he is too busy, and that Bloomsbury is too far away, and all sorts of rubbishy excuses."

"Now, my dear," begged Mrs. Wainwright, "don't put yourself about. I am sure the boy can't help himself, for Merton was always a good-hearted lad." And his mother was right

in her former knowledge of Merton—but it dated from a time before he went to London and became Mr. Mandeville's private secretary.

"He and Bernard Holt were never very friendly, you know," suggested Ursula soothingly.

"And that is Merton all over," continued Gladys in aggrieved tones. "He never is friendly with people we like."

"But about this engagement, my love?" continued Mrs. Wainwright, reverting to her former theme.

"What engagement?" asked Ursula innocently.

"Why, your poor papa's with Georgina Carpenter," replied the outspoken matron, who never thought of wrapping up home truths any more than stall-holders at bazaars think of wrapping up their wares when purchased.

Ursula turned pale. "I don't know what you are talking about!" she gasped.

"Oh, come now!" exclaimed Gladys. "You can't be as innocent as all that."

"I think there must be some mistake," repeated Ursula faintly, and clutched by that hot, sick feeling which is born of all sudden bursts of bad news.

"Well, my love, that remains to be seen," chuckled Mrs. Wainwright. "But, doubtless, your papa thinks he is acting for the best, though Georgina Carpenter is not the one I should choose for all the little fussy ways which are necessary to make a man getting on in years thoroughly comfortable in his own home. She is one that has never been broken in to a man's ways, as you might say, for David has lived his own life pretty independently, and it wants a lot of practice as well as wisdom to keep the worries away from the dinner-table, and to see when a man wants a bit of petting and a jam roly-poly pudding for a treat."

"Surely you must have seen it coming on for ever so long?" said Gladys, looking with some irritation at Ursula's pain-stricken face.

"I never dreamed somehow of my father's marrying again," said Ursula slowly.

"Well, then, you are a soft!" replied her friend with a little laugh. "It's been the talk of all Winstow this winter."

"But don't you take it to heart, my dear," said Mrs. Wainwright kindly, "for, doubtless, it will all turn out for the best. It's heavy work on a young girl having to see to her father altogether, and not according to nature, as you might say."

"I never found it so," interrupted Ursula, with a little catch in her voice.

"Papa was quite hurt at hearing me say so the other day when we were talking it over," continued Mrs. Wainwright, not noticing how Ursula winced at the idea of her father's affairs being thus discussed in the Wainwrights' home, "and no doubt it was foolish of me; but, to tell the truth, for the moment I had forgotten papa wasn't in the shop, and so spoke more freely about such things. But, of course, it isn't in nature for a girl to find the pleasure in darning her father's socks that she would if they belonged to a young man of her own, though it's a bit difficult for the fathers to realise this; so we must be careful and not talk about things that might be hurtful to papa, even if we do think them."

"I wonder what kind of stepmother Georgina will make?" remarked Gladys, with more curiosity than good taste.

"Oh, I am sure a very good one," exclaimed Ursula, quickened by a rush of loyalty for her father and his choice; "it is only that I was unprepared. It was stupid of me, as you say," and the weariness in her voice touched Mrs. Wainwright afresh.

"Don't you worry yourself, my love. And if Georgina is a bit strict and managing, she might be much worse."

"She might be a ballet-dancer, I suppose," chimed in Gladys pertly, "only, as it happens, she isn't."

"She is a bit put out, she is," explained Mrs. Wainwright in a whisper, as her daughter bounced out of the room. "Some little tiff with Merton about the Holts. I don't rightly understand what it is, but Gladys is upset, and so you mustn't set any store by what she says to-day, my love."

Ursula felt too numb to speak, but she gratefully squeezed the big, warm hand of Merton's mother.

"And there will be a place for you still, my dear, in the parlour and the kitchen, too, unless I am very much mistaken. For those clever women who sit on committees and such like new-fashioned fal-lals are poor ones for helping cook on washing days. But I am sure Georgina Carpenter will do her duty."

Ursula nodded, and the good lady went on:

"Only, you see, there is more to be done outside a woman's duty than inside, as a matter of fact. It's duty to have the roast beef and jam

roly ordered for Sundays, but what's a wife if she doesn't see that the Yorkshire pudding and the horse-radish sauce are not forgotten, and the potatoes baked instead of boiled, to look tasty laid round the joint; and the jam in the pudding black currant, if that happens to be the master's favourite? To say nothing of seeing that the conversation takes no worriting turn, which is no easy job sometimes, with a grown-up son at home and a son-in-law dining on Sundays as a regular thing."

And Mrs. Wainwright sighed at the recollection of some former stormy seas through which it had required all her skill to pilot the paternal temper.

"You always manage everything so nicely," said Ursula, with a little hungry sound in her voice; for she felt that a stepmother cut out after Mrs. Wainwright's pattern would not be an unmitigated trial.

"Practice, my love, and a little sense—but they are both needed for married life. Of course it is different in courting days—so different that girls don't always realise it, and perhaps it is a good thing they don't, or there'd be more broken engagements than there are—for then a man likes to hear the woman talk about

herself, and she's nothing loth, you may be sure."

Ursula was looking through the window with unseeing eyes, and hardly heard the words of wisdom which fell from this homely source. She only was conscious that the sun had gone out of her landscape as completely as it had when it sank in the bank of mist out yonder in the west, and left a chill, grey, creeping fog in its train—a fog which quickly wiped out the glow of sunset, and passed as a wet sponge over all the crystallised colouring of that glorious afternoon.

"How well I remember in the old days," continued Mrs. Wainwright, "what questions papa used to ask me just to make me tell him all about myself—how I did my hair, and such like. But, bless you, that doesn't last! And when you get into middle life, a man wants to be talking all about his own concerns, and a good wife must always be interested in them."

"Yes," listlessly.

"There's that story about papa's lawsuit comes in beautiful if anything's gone wrong in the shop, or the meat's a bit underdone in the middle. I just ask a question or two, and it does my heart good when once he's fairly started."

"I should think you know it word for word by now."

"And what of that, love? Of course I know it better than papa does, seeing that I remember it as it was told at first, and before all the things papa wished he had said afterwards came in. But that is of no account to a sensible woman. I don't care twopence about the old lawsuit, but I care very much that papa should get his Sunday afternoon's nap without the indigestion, which a bit of pleasant talk will often avoid."

"I know. I always like father to talk during his meals."

"To be sure. And somehow a man who's getting on a bit like papa seems to have a lot of extra old tales to tell on a Sunday. But it is hard for the young folks not to show when they are a little impatient, though it is a pity. I was begging Gladys only yesterday just to laugh a little when papa tells that anecdote about the baldness; but she is rather willful at times, and answered quite saucily."

"I have been so much to father!" said Ursula sadly.

"And so you will be still, my dear. Indeed, I shouldn't wonder if Georgina's ways weren't

enough to make him think ten times more of your sweet gentleness. So don't you fret."

"I hope he will be very happy with Georgina," Ursula interrupted, "whatever becomes of me."

"There, there, my love! Of course," and Mrs. Wainwright put her arm round the girl's quivering form. "But you will want a husband of your own one of these days, and it will be nice to think there's some one to look after your father when you are married."

"I'd rather have been wanted at home!" burst out Ursula bitterly. "And I would never have failed him ——"

But then their talk was interrupted by the arrival of Gertrude Cox, who also was full of Winstow's latest engagement.

"When is the wedding going to be, Ursula?" she asked eagerly. "And shall you be bridesmaid? I think Georgina is too old for a bridesmaid myself; but still, a proper wedding and all the fine clothes are good for trade," and she laughed noisily.

"It will be very quiet, I am sure," said Ursula, setting her lips into that marble curve which meant she had much suffering to go through and would do so uncomplainingly.

"Georgina is hardly the one for French grey

or lavender," said Mrs. Cox thoughtfully, "not having been married before, which always seems to give a woman a right to something rather sweet in gowns. I think there is nothing more genteel than lavender myself, for one who is getting on."

"It is, indeed," chimed in her mother. "But Ursula is feeling a little upset about the whole affair just now. She will be better after a meat meal and a good night's rest."

"I hate Georgina Carpenter myself," remarked Gertrude, intending to be sympathetic, "and think her a nasty, interfering old cat; but then, that's your father's lookout. Albert was saying she looked to him the kind that would henpeck a man finely, and we had a good laugh over it."

"I must be going now," exclaimed Ursula, to whom Mrs. Albert Cox's conversation was a continual trial, even on days when she was not quivering with the smart of such a bitter sore as this.

"You take my advice, love," said Mrs. Wainwright, as she kissed the girl's white face; "get a bit of something extra for your tea that you fancy—and that reminds me that I have a jar of potted meat in the house, which was made out of the best part of a chicken we had for dinner yesterday, and nobody seemed to want, seeing

that there was roast pork at the other end—if you will accept it? For there is no trouble that doesn't seem heavier on an empty stomach."

"You are very kind," and a tear trembled on Ursula's eyelashes.

"And just live a day at a time, my dear—for none of us are strong enough to carry the whole bundle of life's worries all at once; but the sticks by themselves often feel quite light ones."

"Don't you give up your rights, Ursula," advised Gertrude Cox; "for Georgina's the one who will grab at them, till you have no soul to call your own, even. And I wouldn't begin by giving in to her if I were you."

"There, there, that's enough!" interrupted her mother, returning with a pot of chicken safely tied up in a little white cloth. "Goodbye, Ursula. Come again soon."

"And bring us the details of the wedding," added the unquenchable Mrs. Cox.

It was such a different walk home to Ursula; and she shivered slightly, though the icy chill of sunset was yielding to the soft sheen of the yellow moon, which was clearing the sky again above the mist. At another time she would have seen the beauty of the change which was stealing over the country side, and showing that

there is in nature a more subtle fairness even than that of colour in the glorious pictures which moonlight can paint in black and white. Instead she only tasted the feel of winter, which turned her lips blue, rather than her cheeks pink, as it had done earlier in the afternoon.

Perhaps Mr. Grey was inwardly perturbed by the knowledge of what his marriage would mean to Ursula, and so in an inexplicable masculine way was irritated with her because he was going to hurt her. For Frederick Grey was not peculiar in wishing his way not only to be adopted by those about him, but also extolled by them as the most delightful and enjoyable way which could possibly be trodden by human feet. But Ursula could not keep the pain out of her face as she poured out his tea, though her lips talked pleasantly of ordinary things; and so Mr. Grey was specially cross and irritable.

"You are growing selfish and self-centred," he told her querulously, "and want to be taken more out of yourself."

"I don't mean to be," she answered sadly. "I did not think I was."

"Oh! young people will never own up to a fault," continued her father; "but it grows in them unconsciously. You always look at every-

thing as to how it will affect yourself, without thinking of other people."

Ursula did not speak. She felt the injustice of the attack, and because it was so unjust she was powerless to refute it.

"It has been very bad for you not to have been brought up by a woman"—which was hardly Ursula's fault, though it paved Mr. Grey's way to blame her for it. "I see the lack in your character every day."

"I am sorry."

"There is no need to cry if you are. You know how a scene always upsets my nerves. I do beg, Ursula, that you will save me from it." As there was a silence, he went on. "I have been as good a father to you as I knew how, but it has been a great responsibility to me in my delicate health."

And then something touched Ursula with so sweet and tender a force that she was glad she had no choice but to obey it. She jumped up from the table, and knelt by her father's side.

"I know all about it, daddy dear," she said softly; "and I want you to be happy so much. I will be good to Georgina, and try my best to please you both."

But there was a higher approbation in Ursula's

consciousness than the somewhat surprised approval of her father, and in which she felt a sudden calm after the storm which had raged within.

"What was it spoke to me?" she asked Mrs. Lyall, to whom she was telling the story next day.

"My dear, if you had asked me 'Who was it?' I think I could have told you."

As the girl did not speak, hushed by the loving reverence of her friend's voice, the old lady went on:

"I was just about your age, Ursula, when I first heard that blessed Voice. I had been ordered to bed for some malady which only rest and semi-starvation could cure, and in my youthful health—for I was not feeling ill in myself—and high spirits it seemed an intolerable imprisonment."

"It must be dreadful to be laid up altogether."

"Yes, my dear; it is a stern discipline, even to those who have not youth's buoyancy bounding through their veins; but to me—how well I remember it! It was my utter impotence which made me almost mad. Nothing that I said, or thought, or wished, had the slightest effect on the machinery of doctors and nurses

and regulations in which I suddenly found myself."

"Weren't they kind to you, Mrs. Lyall?"

"Oh, yes! in the widest sense of course, seeing that it was all for my good. But I shall never forget the helpless misery of first feeling myself beaten and unable to resist."

"It was too bad!" interrupted Ursula, with ready sympathy.

"No, my dear. It was quite right in one way, and possibly best for me, as I was a girl with a strong will and vivid personality. But," and the old lady's eyes looked back over the long stretch of years, "it would have been so much easier for me if only I could have been treated as an individual instead of as a case. I was brave enough to do and suffer much in response to personal influence, and very eager to learn from any one who would take the trouble to teach me. But treatment as an inexorable law crushed the life out of me, and I have not ever shed bitterer tears than during those dark days and nights."

Ursula lovingly stroked the fragile, white hand.

"Of course, dear child, it was very foolish of me; for the remedies cured me, and I soon for-

got the strict rules which pressed so hard at the time; but I have never forgotten the despairing loneliness which a little sympathetic teaching and soul-treatment might so easily have healed."

"You always know how people feel," said Ursula, with a grateful glance up into the calm, sweet face.

"Well, my dear, I was only telling you about this long-ago experience as the setting to a special fact. It was after this storm of struggling and rebellion and fret, this helpless beating against the bars of circumstances, which only left me bleeding, and made no difference to them, that a Voice spoke to me, such as you heard last night—a Voice which spoke without language, but none the less truly for that. And, as I listened, the bitterness melted and the restlessness was hushed, and the thought of the cold, hard machinery I remembered no more, for I knew then that it was a Person after all."

"And that helped you?" whispered the girl.

"Ah, my dear, it made all the difference. For time given up to Him can never be grudged, and sacrifices smilingly made for His sake leave no scars."

"Did your imprisonment cease to chafe you then?" asked Ursula with a hungry interest.

"In that wild, wretched way it did. I dare say I still looked through the window with longing eyes, and craved with pathetic hunger for the meals downstairs; but there is no comparison, Ursula, between the galling fetters which a bitter and unblessed experience rivets, and the check of being for a while held back by a loving Hand."

"I don't think I mind quite so much about Georgina as I did yesterday," said Ursula thoughtfully.

"My dear, when God calls us to give up or to suffer anything He does not expect us not to mind. We cannot help minding about things; but, because we mind, it is all the more worth giving to Him."

"But it seems hard!" added the girl sadly.

"So hard that it sometimes takes a lifetime before we find it really easier. But, dear, no great lessons can be learnt easily, and we shall have to try untiringly for a long time yet."

"She and I have never got on well together, you know, Mrs. Lyall."

"That perhaps is because you did not know each other well enough. Not getting on with people means lack of sympathy, and that is generally the want of deeper knowledge."

"Well, I will try my best," the girl promised; and her kind friend made the first, hard realisation of the home change easier by insisting on her spending the next few weeks entirely at Rennel Hill. And there, in an atmosphere too pure and high for petty feelings and vexations, Ursula tried only to look at the deeper thing, underlying as it does most of life's experiences. She felt keenly the crowding out of the life and home in which she had till now been supreme; for Ursula loved her father blindly, and every duty—done for him—had always been sacred to her. Now she was no longer necessary, even no longer wanted, in the little, creeper-covered house which she had loved as home, and it was a bitter smart to see this when life settled down again into the everyday.

Frederick Grey and Georgina Carpenter were quietly married in a grimy London church one chilly March morning, when the east wind lurked at the street corners to stab the heedless passer-by with its invisible knife. David was there to give his sister away, but Ursula did not even know of the day which had been fixed until afterwards. Very soon the honeymoon was over; for Mr. Grey was anxious to return to his accustomed comforts, and Georgina in a hurry

to undertake her new duties and opportunities of reform; and they had nothing to say to each other in that mystic language which only lovers use and understand, but in which they never grow tired of talking.

So Ursula was soon called upon to take up the incessant burden of routine in these new circumstances; and Mrs. Lyall grieved to see the girl's face growing thinner and sadder under the fret of a daily sore. For Georgina was a hard task-mistress, and moreover felt that Ursula needed considerable improvement—a process which is apt to be a painful one unless the operator be all-wise, all-loving, and all-understanding. And Georgina Carpenter was not a fraction of any of the three. Poor Ursula tried her best to look for the ideal, and made many good resolutions under Mrs. Lyall's sweet influence up at Rennel Hill—but it is hard to bring the same down into the daily drudgery of home life, even for the saints who have walked far along the road of character-training; and Ursula was but a poor, little, struggling, human girl at its very beginning.

CHAPTER X

DRIFTING APART

THERE is something in spring which fills most people with a sweet sense of new life and hope and joyousness. However dark the winter days have been, the memory of their bitterness fades before the fresh pictures and the new music which nature brings back again to bless the world. And even the sadness that fills some souls, because such beauty can never again in the old way be for them, finds a deeper answer to its need in the resurrection life which spring-time heralds and foretells to broken hearts and buried hopes. So they, too, can look up and be almost glad. Her recent worries had worn Ursula with a fiercer fret than she had ever known before. Her father's marriage had thrust her from her home, and the place in his life which she had fancied belonged to her; and Georgina was determined that the girl should bow to her new authority, and go out into the world of work, wherein to earn her right to existence.

"She is completely spoiled," his new wife told Mr. Grey, "and that foolish old Mrs. Lyall has only encouraged her in idleness. Send her to London to learn typewriting."

So Ursula was sent, and Georgina had her new home to herself, and began forthwith its reformation. But the hope of spring spread its golden wings over a larger area than moor and forest and field. Ursula felt it in the heart of the great city, and the beginnings of her new life there. The dingy boarding-house in Warwick Street, where so many working girls lodged, seemed to Ursula as the gateway of a wider world wherein perchance she might find a fuller life. She had heard so much of London from Merton, and all its delights, that her pulses raced with the excitement of finding herself really there; and a smile of eagerness lit up her small white face while the tears of bidding good-bye to home were hardly dry upon her eyelashes. London, to Ursula, seemed very full, for was it not crowded with Merton's life and interests, and countless thoughts of him and breathless hopes of meeting him? And it is the one person who fills a place for most of us, more than the outside five millions or whatever number the census population is pronounced to be. It was a

long time since she and Merton had seen each other. He had not been home since those few happy days in the autumn, when Ursula had first found out that their friendship held possibilities, if not certainties, of a yet dearer, deeper tie. She was patient through the training of suffering, and had been perfectly content to wait all through the winter for the gradual growing of the new hope. But the cloud of being sent away from home was bright with a silver lining, for London, to Ursula, meant Merton, and all that Merton meant she had never tried to formulate; it was enough to fill her life, she felt, and that is a large thought to grasp.

As yet the girl did not realise how many worlds are wrapped up in the one called London. To live in the same place seemed to her countrified intelligence to imply being neighbours, and she had no idea of the invisible gulf which lies between next-door houses, as well as that which separates different social sets. Her first Saturday afternoon was a very sunny one, and Merton arranged to meet her in Kensington Gardens and take her for a walk. Though the trees were still bare and black, and the grass but a remnant of last year's faded material, there was a faint flavour of the country in the air, which Ursula

was quick to taste after her first week's experience of a narrow street. Little bits of bursting blossom here and there delighted her nature-loving eyes, and the pale spring sunshine seemed specially good after several days of dull, grey rain and murky fog.

They both felt a little shy of each other at first—Ursula because she had thought of Merton so much, and he, because he had thought of her so little during the long months which had elapsed since they wished each other good-bye at Winstow. For Merton was no longer a new boy in the school of society life. He had drunk deep of its traditions during a gay winter, and learned its lessons with fatal readiness. He had been much with the Mandevilles, and was increasingly possessed with the vivid personalities of Victoria and Violet. He had gladly become one of the former's A.D.C.'s, as her many attachés were nicknamed; but for Violet his admiration had deepened into what he believed to be his life's love, and for which he was willing to give up everything and everybody. The excitement of her presence and power over him drove all other considerations out of his head; and it was with a feeling of impatient disapproval that he heard of Ursula's coming to London, for he had out-

grown the old life and shaken off the remembrance of any ties there which could come between him and this new, wonderful dream of one day winning Violet Mandeville as his wife.

"It seems a year already since I left home," Ursula told him as they strolled together over the grass, "and London is marvellous. You never told me half enough about it, Merton."

"Why, I have told you almost everything I have seen or done."

"Yes, I know. But, Merton, I had no idea of the immense force of life all round which one never touches. The thousand faces that only flash by one's window, and yet the different story written on each! It makes me dizzy to try to grasp it all."

"Why should you?" argued the young man. "You have nothing to do with people you don't know."

"Only, I want to. It makes me sad to think that I can have nothing to do with so many lives. Even when I look round on just the girls who are learning with me, it seems hopeless to think of being friends even with all of them."

"But there is no need that you ever should. Indeed it would be an awful mistake. How can

you tell what kind of girls they are, and where they come from?"

"But you must know people before you can tell what they are, and where they come from," pleaded Ursula.

Merton smiled a superior smile.

"Oh! must you?" he observed cynically.

The girl's face flushed. "Oughtn't I to want to be friends with them?" she asked with that touch of submissiveness which appeals so strongly to some masculine minds.

"London is quite different from the country," Merton condescendingly explained. "You have to look out for yourself up here, and mind you are not taken in. Is there anybody to see after you in this boarding-house place where you have gone to live?"

"There is Mrs. Carter, the matron," replied Ursula doubtfully, "but I don't think she would ever interfere."

"Then it is a very improper arrangement," grumbled Merton. "You have no maid, you see."

Ursula looked up quickly. She did not understand why Merton seemed so strange and far-away. But it was so delightful to be with him again, she could not feel vexed.

"A maid!" and she laughed a little. "You are making fun of me, Merton."

The young man looked a little ashamed of himself.

"It is rather rough on you having to do things for yourself," he said more kindly. For Ursula looked so slight and young, and unfitted to fight the battle of life alone. But her clothes had a ready-made cut which offended his fastidious taste, and he thought how quickly she was losing her looks. He did not know that good looks in London depend far more on the setting than the jewel. There is only time for general effects—none for finding out and learning by heart all the deep, subtle beauty which is hidden from the outsider, but shines pure and true on the faces we understand and are beginning to love.

"I don't mind. I am so used to it. But I want to do everything that you would approve of," and her face grew wistful. "I want to succeed in London, too."

"Oh! girls don't succeed in that kind of way," said Merton ruthlessly, dashing down with one stroke her castle in the air.

"In what way do they, then, Merton? I am so ignorant, you know."

"Girls up here are just ready-made. And if they are pretty or bright or amusing or attractive they are a success, and if they are not any of these things by nature, well then they can't become so. That's all."

"Are you glad to see me?" asked Ursula suddenly, with a hungry look in her eyes.

"Of course I am," replied her companion irritably. "What rot to ask! Only, don't you know, Ursula, I can't be meeting you like this and going for walks as we did in the country."

"You must tell me just what you want, and I shall be quick to do it. I don't understand London ways yet," and her smile was very sweet—the sweetness that comes through suffering and shines as the light of evening at the close of a storm-filled day. It drew Merton nearer to her, and it was with something of his old confidence that he answered,—

"That's right, Ursula. I should hate to seem horrid to you."

"You couldn't," she exclaimed eagerly.

"But it might seem so if you didn't understand. You will, though, won't you?"

"Of course I shall. Is it that our ways will lie rather far apart, Merton, just for a time?"

"They must. We can't help it," he muttered, half angry with himself.

"Don't be vexed," she pleaded gently. "I know it isn't your fault. It was stupid of me to think that London could be so small, when it is bigger than all the country put together. And it is so nice just to have seen you to-day. I know you will be as good to me as you can," she added, with loyal faith.

"Of course I shall," and Merton looked away down the empty avenue of leafless trees—anywhere sooner than into her truthful eyes. "Only a fellow isn't his own master always."

"I know—I mean I shall know all about it soon. And oughtn't you to be going somewhere else now? Tell me, Merton, for I could not bear to be a bother to you."

"Well, I promised to look in at Grosvenor Square about tea-time, but there is no hurry yet."

"You must not be late," said Ursula quietly, "and besides I am a little tired now myself, and must be home in good time," she added, knowing from long experience that the purest unselfishness is to make the other one feel unselfish in granting us their own heart's desire instead of ours.

"Of course you must," exclaimed Merton with

ready relief, "how stupid of me not to think of it! It has been awfully nice seeing you again," he added with a clear conscience now the verb had slipped into the past tense. And Ursula rejoiced at the bright look which had come again into his face. It took away the unnaturalness of Merton as a semi-stranger.

"And about seeing you again," he said carelessly. "Why, I will write. I am so awfully full up just now."

"Could you ever come to tea?" she asked a trifle shyly. "I would always be in if you would let me know."

"All right. I'll look you up. And keep to yourself, Ursula, as much as you can."

"Very well," a little drearily, for hard work and no friends is not an alluring prospect in girlhood's eyes. And then the big lumbering omnibus swallowed her up and carried her away out of Merton's world down into the cramped one which was contained in the boarding-house of Warwick Street.

And Merton mounted the crimson-carpeted staircase of the Mandevilles' house with a throbbing sense of gladness at the sound of Violet's laughter through the half-open drawing-room door.

"It was a most awful experience," Lady Clementina was saying. "I wonder I am alive to tell the tale!"

"But since you are," said Merton with a smile as he shook hands, "do tell it to me."

"We wanted you dreadfully, Mr. Wainwright," and Violet sent his pulses galloping as she looked up into his face; "where have you been?"

"Since Thursday?" added Victoria reproachfully. "It isn't nice of you to drop us like that."

"My purse was stolen out of the carriage yesterday afternoon in Bond Street," continued Lady Clementina, "and I was so flurried by a policeman's dashing into my tailor's where I was being fitted ——"

"With only one sleeve on, like a Hussar," interpolated Victoria.

"That I was foolish enough to identify it as mine. So this morning I actually had to go to the police-court and give evidence. I thought I should have died!"

"Poor mummy!" said Violet, stroking her mother's hand. "I was so afraid they would hang you or do something awful."

"Judges are always like dogs to me," re-

marked Victoria; "their owners assure you that they won't bite anybody but burglars, but I am in terror of them all the same."

"They are so snappy," added Violet; "only mother hadn't a judge this morning—only a dull, black police-magistrate, whom anybody might have asked to luncheon without a qualm."

"Yes, I wish it had been a proper red judge," said Lady Clementina. "Seeing I had to be in a trial, I had rather it had been more first-class."

"The court was unspeakably filthy, Mr. Wainwright, and mother wore her newest Paris gown."

"It seemed more respectful to the law, Vi dear; and, besides, I thought they wouldn't bully me so much if they thought I looked nice."

"But you couldn't fail to do that, Lady Clementina, even in your oldest gown."

"How sweet of you to say so, Mr. Wainwright! It is a pity you are not a police-magistrate or a judge. But the dirt really was awful, and such terribly infectious people all about! You know how frightened I am of infection. I always wear a camphor bag in London."

"Is that a preventative?" asked Merton.

"Of course it is. I have never even had the

measles since it was made, four years ago. Well, as I was telling you, they actually wanted me to kiss a Testament which was black with microbes, and which I myself had seen a woman with smallpox kiss since I entered the court!"

"And mother refused, like a Christian martyr," boasted Victoria.

"Nothing would have induced me to have kissed it," mused her ladyship. "I would rather have gone to prison than have the smallpox, any day, as I told the magistrate. So they fetched me a clean one. I think I will carry one of my own in future in case of emergencies. You can get very small editions from the Bible Society."

"I have known oaths administered in quite unlikely places," agreed her eldest daughter, "even at a smart party."

"You can't think how trying Charles was, Mr. Wainwright. He gave his evidence in a way which made me seem so untruthful; and the whole thing was his fault for running after the thief in the first instance, instead of standing to his duty beside the carriage door."

"They asked mother what she said to Charles!"

"And I said that I had told him he could make up his mind to what lie he liked, only I insisted on his sticking to it afterwards. And

everybody laughed—nasty, rude things! But I was obliged to tell the truth, because of that bothering perjury."

"You get seven years for that, father says," remarked Violet wisely.

"Isn't it awful to think of!" gasped Lady Clementina. "And just for one little lie! It is a mercy society isn't carried on in that way, or we should all be doing seven years, if not seventy times seven."

"Charles lost his head," Victoria observed.

"I can't be surprised at that, dear, seeing that he loses it if any one asks twice for potatoes. And then, Mr. Wainwright, they wanted to know what I had said to the policeman."

"He was a nasty, officious thing to catch the thief!" And Violet shook her golden head. "I generally adore policemen, but then I have never met one professionally, so to speak, before."

"And I had offered the policeman ten shillings to let the man go, and the thief another ten if only he would clear off and make no more fuss. That did not sound very dignified in the court."

"But you looked so dignified, mother dear! It more than made up."

"There was the wisdom of my Paris gown, Vi.

It is my opinion if it had not been for that frock I should have been at this present moment in a felon's cell."

"But you were a witness, not a prisoner," argued Merton.

"You mark my words, Mr. Wainwright—when once you are inside a court it doesn't matter much what you are, you are in a mess anyway. And they prove you guilty of hundreds of things you have never dreamed of, whether they punish you for them or not."

"But you left without a stain on your character, as they say, and went with me to lunch at the Middlesexes'," said Victoria.

"As a sort of moral quarantine," added her ladyship. "Annabel was simply delightful. She talked about the police-court mission all lunch. I suppose I suggested it to her."

"And what have you been doing to-day, Mr. Wainwright?" asked Violet carelessly.

"Oh, nothing much. I walked here through the gardens and across the park."

"Kensington Gardens are singularly instructive on a Saturday afternoon," observed Victoria, with her quizzical little smile. "If it wasn't for Hurlingham, I should often go there to study romance."

Merton felt himself growing rather warm.

"People who meet each other in Kensington Gardens are not necessarily in love," he argued in secret self-defence.

"The men are generally sitting sideways, I notice," remarked Victoria.

"Sitting sideways, Vic! What do you mean?"

"My dear mother, if a man sits sideways when he is talking to a woman, it is an unfailing sign that he is in love with her. Surely you know a little thing like that?"

Merton remembered how he had sat looking straight before him as he and Ursula rested for a while down by the Serpentine, but he decided that he would not meet her there at all again. It would be better to call at Warwick Street, for it would be just as nice for Ursula, and there would be then no possibility of meeting the Mandevilles. This was the first time that the unworthy feeling of shame about any of his old friends had crept into Merton's heart.

"We are going to a musical party to-night at the Trevors'," said Victoria. "Won't you come to dinner and go with us, Mr. Wainwright?"

"Oh, do!" begged Violet. "Musical parties are so dull unless there is somebody to whisper to."

"I shall be delighted." And Merton already felt leagues away from Ursula and their afternoon walk together.

"It will be so nice having a man with us," observed Lady Clementina, "for Mr. Mandeville won't go."

"He never will to musical things," Violet chimed in. "He wouldn't even go to the State concert last week."

"Oh, but that wasn't because of the music, but because of his own silk stockings," interrupted Victoria. "White silk stockings are a red rag, so to speak, to a Cabinet Minister."

"It is so like a man to expect to be comfortable in his party clothes," said her ladyship. "Why, ours are seldom short of positive torture."

"I always think it is so tiresome when people bother about your horses having bearing-reins, considering all the far more uncomfortable things we poor mortals wear for the sake of looks."

"You are right, Victoria," remarked her mother, "for a bearing-rein would be *déshabillé* compared to one of Madame Camille's waistbands."

"I pity Lady Trevor," and Violet looked up into Merton's face, and set his pulses hammering,

"because of that awful daughter of hers—the one called Vaseline or Magnesia, or one of those names."

"You are thinking of Meresia Murdoch—the Trevor girl Dickie used to call Mint Saucia."

"Oh, yes! I forgot," and Violet's laugh rang out like the trill of a gay little bird. "But Aminta Trevor is dreadful, with her theories, and strong-mindedness, and oddities."

"And poor Lady Trevor would so have enjoyed a proper daughter," added Victoria; "at least, I mean, of course, an improper one."

"Billy Trevor is such a nice boy!" remarked Violet, with a glance at Merton through her long eyelashes. And Merton felt a hot hatred for Sir William Trevor's son and heir.

That night as Merton was driving through the silent, starlit park with the Mandevilles, Ursula sat looking out of her bedroom window on to the ugly, slate-coloured country which lies at the back of most London houses, and from which springs the leaden forest of chimney pots amid a grimy haze of smoke. So many houses all hustled together, for standing room is worth too much within the magic circle of our great metropolis, and so many more lives crowded even into each house. Ursula was sad with the

mystery of it all, and yet full of a new interest, deeper and further-reaching than she had known in the old country town where every life came in some measure within touch of the others. The immensity of London cast over her that mantle of awe which we feel in the presence of whatever is so much greater than ourselves, whether it be amid the solitude of mountains, or on the trackless breadth of ocean, or under the myriad wonders of the starry night. The untiring tide of human life, swelling up the huge thoroughfares, and rushing down every side street and alley, just as the sea comes up to fill each channel and creek that branches off into the heart of the rocks, awoke new feelings in the girl's heart, which seemed to swamp her small life and its petty experiences in one huge wave of pity for so much want, which she could never even grasp in thought, much less attempt to relieve. The dull, seamed faces of hard-worked men, the joyless ones of tired women, the impish laughter of the squalid street children, or the wailing cries of the wan babies no one had time to soothe or hush—all these were illustrations to Ursula of histories seared with suffering, or tainted with the ugliness of cruelty, sordidness, and crime. She suddenly wondered in her ignorance how

any one could be happy in London, as she stretched out yearning, helpless hands through the open window towards that vast sea of need which lay outside. For all great multitudes create in thoughtful hearts an echo of that infinite compassion which moved the Christ as He trod this earth nearly nineteen hundred years ago.

"I must do something to help!" was her conviction as well as her cry. So another burden was piled upon her already heavily-weighted conscience; and before long the inmates of the boarding-house—all girls who had their way to make in the world for themselves—had confided in Ursula their troubles and their hopes; while she, entering into the lives of others with that unselfish sympathy which God had planted in her heart even as a child, had little time for the realisation of those dear hopes of her own with which she came to London, as well as few moments, except every now and then in the quiet of the night, in which to fret about the loss of them.

"I wish it wasn't going to be a musical party," whispered Violet to Merton as they elbowed their way up the crowded staircase of the Trevors' house. "And Lady Trevor is so dreadfully

musical that I know there won't be a single tune. It is frightfully ignorant of me, I know, but I do like tunes; don't you?"

"Rather!" assented Merton, who would have agreed with Violet if she had expressed a liking for penal servitude.

"Oh!" gasped Victoria. "There are chairs—rows of them. That means I shall have to be silent for at least an hour."

"It is very hard," said her sister, "when you are grown up, to be made to go back into a sort of horrid society school. I might just as well be ten years old, mightn't I?" And she appealed to Merton with a pout.

"Well, anyway, you mustn't whisper any more," Victoria commanded, "for Lady Trevor is shrieking 'hush' in the back drawing-room. Think how much worse it is for me to have to be silent."

"Yes, dear," sighed Violet. "I do hope the effort won't give you any mortal disease. But it's a risk, I know."

All during the time that a very fierce Italian was singing a still fiercer cycle of songs, Merton was watching Violet, and thinking how delightful it was to be one of the Mandevilles' attachés. Major Trayne had joined them, and was playing

with Victoria's fan—a fashionable, silent fan, perfect in fabric, form, and colour, but, after the manner of such fans, incapable of creating a breath of air. When at last the songs ceased he said in a low voice:

"Don't you think we might have a prayer now to cheer us up a little?"

Victoria laughed. "I don't want to alarm you unnecessarily," she said; "but I am afraid I could not live through another cycle. And don't you think we have earned our suppers?"

"I do. Perhaps Lady Clementina has already gone down. She is nowhere to be seen."

"Oh, no!" contradicted Victoria. "Mother is a total abstainer from suppers just now. She is dieting herself most strictly."

"What for?"

"To please Dr. Warburton, I think. There is nothing at all the matter with her, I am thankful to say. But specialists always diet you or send you to the Riviera, and as he couldn't do the latter in June, he had no alternative but to forbid her to eat anything she likes, poor dear!"

"Think of being forbidden plovers' eggs," exclaimed Major Trayne; "why, life would be shorn of its glory."

"It was so vexing," continued Victoria, "that

mother had nothing to do on Saturday morning, because that is what made her consult Dr. Warburton. I had gone to the meet of the coaches, and Violet was seeing after father. Saturday is always such a busy day for daughters. And so mother got into this mischief. If only Blanche had been old enough to take care of her she might have been refreshing herself with lobster mayonnaise this very minute."

"Poor Lady Clementina!"

"We had such a dreadful dinner party last week," Victoria confided in him presently.

"Why dreadful?"

"Father settled the guests," replied Victoria simply. "He had a sudden desire to be master in his own house, and—well, you know what that ends in—socially!"

"But isn't Mr. Mandeville generally masterful?" asked Major Trayne, dispensing strawberries and cream.

"Of course he is, in the House of Commons and the government offices, and little places of that kind, and nobody objects to it. But a dinner party is so important! You really can't afford to let a man have his head."

"Should you always want to be the master in your own house—or rather your husband's?" he

asked, looking at her searchingly through his long, narrow eyes.

"I should always let my husband settle my religion and my politics," observed Victoria thoughtfully; "but I should settle who was asked to meet whom at dinner. And he would live to thank me for it. Do you think it would be greedy to ask for something to eat?"

"I think it would be better manners to wait until you are offered something," he remarked solemnly.

"You are really rather nice!" she replied with a smile.

"What shall I get for you, Miss Mandeville?"

"I should like lobster mayonnaise, but perhaps I had better have a sandwich; it will be less trouble, won't it?"

"It will to-morrow," he answered wisely.

"Oh, Mr. Wainwright!" gasped Violet, "unless you provide me with immediate provisions I am sure I shall faint. Not of a meaty substance —it reminds me so of the Fairleighs' party."

"What happened there?" asked Merton, securing an ice.

"I took a sandwich, and there was mutton inside—cold, unadulterated mutton! Did you ever

hear of such a thing? I couldn't eat it, of course, and it is always so difficult to make away with things satisfactorily."

"Then what did you do with it?"

"I hid it in a neighbouring vase, and I never returned to my *mouton*. I wonder if it was eventually found? It might easily have been traced, I should imagine, as time went on."

"And what do you think about this new Bill for the abolition of Voluntary Schools?" an old county magnate was asking Victoria.

"Miss Mandeville hasn't had any time to think about it," interrupted Major Trayne, "seeing that it was only introduced in the House to-night."

"As if that would prevent my expressing an opinion!" exclaimed Victoria, with fine scorn. "Of course, Sir Edward, I disapprove of the abolition of anything voluntary. They will be abolishing self-will next, and think how dull we shall all be."

"Did you read the Prime Minister's speech of yesterday?" Sir Edward asked again.

"No," replied Victoria, "but I agree with every word of it."

A few Saturdays after the Trevors' party Merton took Ursula to the academy. He felt he was neglecting her, and so was irritated with her

for coming to London at all, thereby putting him in a faintly reprehensible position. The academy was a sudden spurt of reparation, and Ursula's delight knew no bounds.

"It is so good of you, Merton, to bring me here," she exclaimed brightly, as they walked up the crimson stairs; "I have wanted to see the pictures so much, and yet a shilling seemed a good deal for just a passing pleasure."

Merton felt vaguely uncomfortable.

"I haven't been here myself since the private view, and you never see the pictures then."

"Why, it would take weeks to see all these pictures properly. How beautiful they are, Merton! it is simply bewildering. And to think how much there is through every single one of the artist himself, and why he wanted to show the world just this particular thing."

"Oh! I expect they are chiefly guided by the best effects they can produce — nothing more. As a fellow with the trick of marble painting, or distant hills, or blue sea, will always cling to that kind of thing, whatever the name of his picture may be, or else stick a postage stamp of it up in a corner of the whole, however inappropriate."

"I don't believe that," and Ursula shook her

head. "There is something much deeper than a trick in art."

"Well, come on. We shall never reach the big room if you are as slow as this."

"I do love that one," said Ursula, tearing herself away from the contemplation of a cottage interior, where a girl sat watching the grey dawn steal through the unshuttered window, while the candle flickered in its socket and cast a weird light on to the drawn face of a dying man. "What do you think it means, Merton? I believe she wants him to die. Look at the cold despair on her face. How can she sit so still? Because even if he has been cruel to her, he needs her now."

"There is Miss Mandeville," exclaimed Merton, "with her aunt, Lady Middlesex. Isn't she stylish, Ursula?"

"Oh, very! And her dress is lovely."

"Why, who ever would have dreamed of finding you here, Mr. Wainwright?" said Victoria, coming up to him with her ready smile. "You are improving your mind on the sly," and then she stopped and looked at Ursula.

"This is Miss Grey," stammered Merton, "an old friend of mine."

"Don't you find him dreadfully deteriorated?"

asked Victoria, shaking her neat little head. "But I am afraid our companionship has a demoralising effect."

Ursula looked up with wide, puzzled eyes, and Merton felt distinctly irritated. It was so stupid of her not to take her cue and know her part. Then Lady Middlesex unconsciously came to the rescue.

"Are not some of the pictures sweet?" she remarked vaguely. "I always like those with sheep in them best."

"And the Highland cattle, too," said Ursula, with an eager look. "This one we are opposite now, of a herd in the snow, is splendid, I think."

"Yes," added Victoria. "Cold beef is a speciality of Frank Willoughby's. I begged him only last night at dinner to serve it us cold."

"I wonder how people can paint snow," continued her aunt; "it must be such chilly work. I do not think it can be good for them. If I were an artist I should always choose warm subjects, because my lungs are not very strong."

"What should you paint if you were an artist?" Victoria asked Merton. "I should do portraits myself, because it would be so interest-

ing talking to the people when they came to sit for you."

"That would depend rather on the people, wouldn't it?" asked Merton.

"Of course it wouldn't," Victoria replied with fine scorn. "When other people are uninteresting it is generally your own fault. Because, you see, every one is like a match that wants striking. Some people strike on anything, and they are the easy ones to get on with, and some will only strike on their own particular box, like Bryant and May's; but it is our business to supply the striking surface."

"It always distresses me," chimed in Lady Middlesex, "that artists choose the subjects they do. So many heathen incidents are portrayed, and I feel sure that they must have a bad tendency. I do not think heathens ought to be painted."

"But they used to paint themselves, Lady Middlesex," laughed Merton—"at least according to this picture of the Druids and their oak."

"Painting themselves is not solely the prerogative of the heathen," remarked Victoria drily.

"If artists will paint savages and dreadful

people of that kind," continued her ladyship, "I think there ought always to be a missionary in the foreground. It raises the tone."

"But, Aunt Annabel," expostulated Victoria, "do you think a missionary would always be sufficiently picturesque in the near distance?"

"My dear, a right tendency is the most important thing, and every sacrifice must be made in order to preserve it."

"What do you think?" Victoria asked Ursula, wishing to draw her into the conversation rather than ascertain her opinion.

"If I could paint pictures," said Ursula earnestly, "I should like to choose some simple subject that people would not notice of themselves, and bring out the deeper meaning so that I might show the world the beauty of the commonplace."

Lady Middlesex raised her glasses and looked at the girl's eager face.

"What a strange idea!" she murmured. "There seems to me no connection between beauty and the commonplace. Indeed, I dislike the latter very much."

"But we have to live in it," said Ursula.

And Merton felt ashamed of her seriousness. Why would not she play with words and thoughts

as Victoria and Violet did, and not look as if everything mattered so much?

"Oh, what a sweet baby!" exclaimed Lady Middlesex, as they drifted on with the crowd, "and with such a fair complexion! I am sure the man must be extremely nice who painted it. Do not you think I might ask him to dinner, Victoria?"

"I would consult my uncle first," said her niece demurely, glancing at the catalogue.

"Pangbourne was such a pretty baby," continued his mother, "and quite as fair at that age; but he has spoiled his complexion at Eton, playing that hot cricket in the blazing sun."

"But it doesn't matter a bit for a boy, Aunt Annabel."

"No, I suppose not. But I always disliked freckles myself, so it seems hard that my only son should not have had a skin that tanned instead of freckled." And her ladyship sighed.

"Come to tea to-morrow," said Victoria, suddenly holding out her hand to Merton, but looking towards the pale, shabby girl who was following them mechanically, as she gazed with soul-full eyes on the pictures they passed so carelessly by.

So Merton felt himself dismissed, and hated

the feeling; and in an unjust way was irritated with Ursula as the innocent cause of his dismissal. If it had not been for her presence, he knew Victoria would have probably offered him a seat in their carriage, and he would have driven with her and her aunt in the park, and perhaps joined in some piquant little tea-party such as his emaciated soul was growing to delight in.

"I am sick of this place!" he exclaimed impatiently; "it is so stuffy. Where do you want to go now, Ursula?"

And in an instant the girl knew what had happened.

"Wouldn't you rather have gone with them?" she asked bravely. "Never mind me, Merton; I could be happy here for hours, and you can easily catch them up on the stairs."

"Of course not! And, besides, they did not ask me." And his handsome face clouded over.

"Then will you come back and have tea with me?" the girl suggested half-timidly; "but not if it bothers you, Merton."

"All right," somewhat ungraciously.

"I should like to show you where I live. And some of the girls are rather nice—Susie Wade, for instance. She is an artist, and she hopes to have a picture here some day."

"I suppose Violet had gone to Hurlingham," remarked Merton irrelevantly. "It must be jolly there on a hot afternoon like this."

"You won't ever let me interfere with you, will you, Merton?" And her voice rang plaintively.

And then, because Merton was guilty of the feeling, he was furious at its suggestion.

"You make me out a perfect brute!" he said crossly. "I don't know what has come to you, Ursula."

"It was silly and stupid of me," and she smiled bravely; "but I see so little of you up here, and—and I had looked forward to seeing so much."

Merton's temper was passing, and moreover he felt a lurking shame at his own ungraciousness.

"Never mind," he said, with his old smile. "We can neither of us help it, can we?"

"I know we can't." And the sun came out again on her face. "And I understand how impossible it is for you to see more of me than you do."

"Or for you to see more of me," he added, trying to shake off every remnant of responsibility.

"Of course. It isn't any one's fault, but just the result of our having to work in different worlds."

"Yes, that's it," eagerly. "I am so glad you see it in the right light, Ursula."

The girls in the boarding-house were greatly impressed by Merton Wainwright; and he, anxious to make up to Ursula for what had gone before, was very pleasant to them, as well as to Mrs. Carter, the matron. Merton could be very pleasant when he chose. He inquired about the little artist's ambitions, and left Susie with a fresh feeling of encouragement and fired with new energies to succeed. He described fashionable dishes he had eaten at parties to Josephine Riddell, a tall, gaunt girl who was studying at the School of Cookery, and regarded entrées and savouries as two of the most important things in life. He chaffed Mrs. Carter concerning her chaperoning duties till the little woman felt she had an assured position in society, and forgot what hard work it was to make a living and earn from her impecunious boarders a satisfactory wage. He praised the strength of the tea and the taste of the cake, and altogether there never had been so popular a visitor in Warwick Street.

But Ursula was puzzled. She felt that something new had come into Merton's character which she could not understand; and she knew that these pleasantries did not ring true. The society training of the Mandevilles was bearing fruit in Merton's superficial efforts to make the tea-party at the boarding-house a success, and they were laudable efforts, too. Only Ursula had never graduated in that school.

"Have you really liked it, Merton?" she asked wistfully, as they turned out for a little walk together after tea.

The young man laughed carelessly.

"How could I, Ursula? It is a beastly life for you to be living in at all. And what girls!"

"They are very nice," exclaimed Ursula loyally, "and very kind to me."

"But their clothes! That little, short-haired artist in the terra-cotta dressing-gown is unspeakable."

"She is very clever and very good. I always enjoy a talk with Susie Wade. She told me the other day that——"

"Spare me any further confidences of hers, my dear Ursula. And that appalling cooking-girl! How can you be happy among such people?"

"I have no choice in the matter, Merton," she

answered quietly; "and life is not so full of happiness that we can afford to lose even a bit of it. There is always some happiness in friendship, you know, and I am grateful for it."

"Well, you are easily pleased, I must say. And what a horrid street this is! Why did you ever come to London, Ursula? Winstow is a much better place for you."

"My father and Georgina sent me. There is no room for me any longer at home," and her lips quivered. "And I have to learn how to work for myself. But I would much rather be at Winstow; the interests here are too big and overwhelm me."

"They seem to me precious small in such a little boarding-house as that."

"Oh, but, Merton, it isn't the size of the house, or anything outside, which makes big interests; it is the life of the person inside. And there are such crowds of people in London that the immensity of all their different lives is too great to grasp."

"Why bother about them, then? You are too intense, and think too much about things. But I must be off now; it is getting late, and I am going to the opera. Good-bye, Ursula."

After she had seen him drive off in the han-

som, a strange sadness crept across the girl's heart, like the shadow of some dark cloud on a sunny day. She felt afresh the disappointment of seeing so little of Merton, even though they were both living in London; and the little she did see was not quite as it used to be in the old happy days at Winstow.

"What a good-looking young man Mr. Wainwright is!" exclaimed Josephine, as Ursula re-entered the room. "And so pleasant, too!"

"His profile is perfect!" said Susie thoughtfully; "and there is only one fault in his face. The eyes are a little too near together."

"I am sure, Miss Grey," chimed in Mrs. Carter, "it has been a great pleasure to us all to meet such a distinguished gentleman. He is in the government service, I believe."

"Yes;" and Ursula smiled to herself with pleasure at their appreciation of Merton. She never remembered that the Wainwrights were socially very inferior to herself, or that it was not in the least an honour for Merton to visit her. She was only so proud of him. And the cloud was swept away from her thoughts, and she felt the old delight again in Merton's success quite independently of all other considerations.

"He was so beautifully dressed, too," said one

of the others admiringly. "I should love to have a friend who wore a coat like that."

Ursula laughed. "Yes, he always looks nice."

"It is a pity you can't see more of him," said Mrs. Carter thoughtfully; "but I should think he might take you out a little more now the weather is so fine."

"Oh, no." And Ursula forgot her own slightly sore feeling in fighting Merton's battles. "He is so tremendously busy, he can hardly ever get off. It is so difficult for him to get any time at all to himself in the full life of work and society which he is leading."

"But you would like to see him oftener, I suppose?" queried Susie.

"Of course. But there is something much bigger and better than just having the things we like. I would far rather feel how splendidly Merton is getting on, than have ever so many treats which would hinder him."

"I wouldn't," exclaimed Josephine; "for there are so few treats in such lives as ours that I am hungry for all I can get. I shouldn't think about his getting on."

"Then you would not be much of a friend!" And the light of self-sacrifice shone through Ursula's delicate little face.

"Miss Grey is right," said Susie quietly; "only there are not many of us so unselfish as she is."

"But it is not unselfishness," argued Ursula, "when I want Merton to win all the prizes. The pleasure and pride in them are as much mine as his."

"I think any one is fortunate who has you for a friend." And the little artist shook back the short, shaggy hair falling over her keen, eager eyes.

When Ursula fell asleep that night, she dreamed that she and Merton were playing together again as boy and girl, and her soul was possessed with a delighted admiration for all he was and said and did. And when morning came she brought back with her into wakefulness that golden glamour which a dream will so often weave round people we know, drawing them nearer and making them dearer than they were the day before. And the sunshine of that dream warmed her heart and lightened her step, till at last it faded away into the real again; and Ursula began to feel that the days were dull and the work hard when Merton's time—"through no fault of his own," she loyally added—was being spent so far away.

CHAPTER XI

THE WHITE BALL

THE season was at its last leap when Ursula received a card of invitation from Lady Clementina Mandeville for a white ball.

"A white ball!" exclaimed one of the girls at breakfast, "what is that?"

"I don't know," said Ursula simply, "but Merton Wainwright will tell me."

"You are in luck!" continued Susie Wade. "I have never been to a proper ball in my life, and this will be a gorgeous one, I know. How jolly for you, Miss Grey!"

A smile was kindled in the girl's eyes at the thought of the coming pleasure. The idea of meeting Merton at a real ball filled her with a breathless sense of delightful expectation. She had not seen much of him of late, but then how could she, she argued to herself, seeing that her working hours were so long and his engagements so many? He had seemed altered, too, but that she felt was because he hated to come down into the unattractive world in which she

lived, out of the beautiful, gay one wherein he had learned to be so entirely at home. But at the Mandevilles' ball she would be able to meet him on his own ground, and for once enter into the joys which so many girls take as a matter of course. She was always wanting to climb up to Merton, and the disappointments of the London life had all, she imagined, arisen from the fact that work chained her down instead of letting her follow him on his flights. She was perfectly loyal to Merton and the thought that he was not really so to her had never crossed her brain. She would have driven it out as unworthy even if it had.

"Another letter for you, Miss Grey," announced Mrs. Carter, the matron, "it was left among mine by mistake."

Ursula stretched out her hand with a smile, for she knew Merton's letters well by sight. Surely it was all coming right again between her and him. The distance there had been between them of late would be bridged over at the ball, and she would so quickly forget all the dreary days behind her when it seemed as if they were indeed drifting apart.

"A white ball is where all the girls wear white and have their hair powdered," she explained

after reading her note. It was only a hasty scrawl, but it said that he should want her to dance the first dance with him, and Ursula forgot there would be any following ones in the intoxication of that thought.

"I can powder hair," said Susie Wade, kindly, "and shall be so glad to help you, Miss Grey."

"It is indeed a great occasion," chimed in Mrs. Carter. "There is always something wonderful to a girl in her first ball."

"I am old for this to be my first," Ursula explained, "but there were never such dissipations at Winstow." And her eyes sparkled.

"I remember it was at my first ball that I met my late husband," continued the matron confidentially, "and we fell in love at first sight. Oh! it was beautiful, girls! I often think of it as the loveliest sight of my whole life," and tears filled the good lady's eyes.

"It is white because the third Miss Mandeville is coming out at it, and her name is Blanche," said Ursula.

"What a pretty idea!" exclaimed several eager voices.

"We wish the rest of us were in your shoes," chimed in Josephine Riddell, with rather a hungry look. For girls will still long for pleasure

and its possibilities in spite of all the examinations they pass and the certificates they win.

"What shall you wear, Miss Grey?" for Mrs. Carter had once been a pretty girl, and she knew the importance of a frock.

Ursula's face fell. "My only evening dress is mauve. And I cannot afford a new one."

"Oh, yes, you can!" And Susie spoke eagerly. "Material is so cheap, and we will all help you to make it at home, won't we, girls?"

A murmur of assent ran round the table.

"You are all very kind," said Ursula gratefully; "it seems a shame that you should not have the pleasure, too."

"I can work very quickly," added Mary Wilkinson, a girl of very humble origin, who cherished a passionate affection for Ursula. "And I get the latest fashions from the shop."

Mary Wilkinson worked in a large west end drapery establishment and lodged at Mrs. Carter's to whom she had been recommended by the vicar's wife of the country parish wherein stood her widowed mother's humble home.

"Something gauzy, I should suggest," said Mrs. Carter. "There is nothing like tulle or net for a girl's first ball-dress in my opinion. How well I remember my own first tulle frock. It

was so becoming. I never knew," and the matron bridled a bit, "until I saw myself in that costume what a pretty girl I was. It makes such a difference!"

"And a sash, I think," added Susie, "which both looks dressy and ties up the whole thing well in the middle."

"It sounds as if you were going to dress me as a doll for a bazaar," laughed Ursula. "One of those that rather skimp buttons and strings but are fastened together with pins and a sash."

"Must your shoes be white, too?" asked Josephine.

"I am afraid so," with a sigh, "and there is another expense."

"Never mind, dear, we'll manage it," said the indomitable Susie.

"I have an old pair of blue shoes," suggested Josephine, "only I am afraid they would be of no use."

"Are they fairly strong and not worn out?" asked Susie.

"Oh yes! but so frightfully dirty that they are impossible, I am afraid."

"I have it!" cried the girl, clapping her hands. "I will paint them white."

"What a splendid idea!" chorused the others.

"You are very clever!" exclaimed Ursula admiringly.

"They will look like new," continued the little artist cheerfully. "Leave them to me, and you shall be shod like a princess."

"There was once a ball at the Court at home," said Mary Wilkinson, "and we went up with mother to see it with the servants from the top gallery. It was something grand. I often think now when I am serving young ladies with fine things where they will wear them, and how many stories will be woven into them before they reach the rag bag."

"I suppose every gown has its scrap of our history woven into it," mused Ursula. "It is a nice thought. It must make your work much more interesting."

"Yes, Miss Grey, it does," replied the meek-eyed girl dreamily. "I always feel a personal interest in what everybody wants to buy."

"But don't you get dreadfully tired, and especially with those people who only come to pull about the things and never mean to buy them?"

"Oh, yes, sometimes! But I can't help being half sorry for them, too, Miss Grey, when they try to do little mean tricks, and forget that I am a woman though I may not be a lady; and it

shocks me as a woman that ladies should haggle and bargain and quarrel just to get things for less price than they are worth. They seem to think that I am only a piece of necessary furniture."

"Poor Mary! But we workers know what a hard thing life is."

"It is a great privilege to mix with all of you," continued the shop girl quietly, "for I hate the talk of the other assistants. But the work itself I like, even though it is so tiring."

"I never thought about the girl who served me in a shop," confessed Ursula, "before I came here and knew you. I mean as a girl. Though I hope for my own sake I never was rude or impatient."

"If all ladies were like you, Miss Grey, we should never be worried and badgered by our customers in the way we are. I always think myself that if I were a rich lady I should be so glad to pay rightly for the things I wanted, but it is the rich ones that beat us down the most and grumble the loudest. It is so strange to me."

"I remember that my dear old lady friend at home once said that many people who are ashamed of ancestors in trade are quite proud of

the vulgar, bargaining spirit which is the legacy those ancestors have left them. And she has always taught me that to be well-bred is first our duty to ourselves before it touches other people, and that therefore there is no shirking the obligation at any time or in any place."

"Well, all ladies are not like that," said Mary.

"Oh, no!" and Ursula smiled. "Mrs. Lyall is a head and shoulders above most people in the perfection of her breeding."

"I always supposed that good manners were like best clothes," chimed in Josephine, "and that they only mattered on proper occasions."

"I think they are more like beauty itself," argued Ursula, "and so by ever neglecting them you actually lose them in a measure."

"Just as to freckle your complexion spoils it lastingly," said Susie.

"Or to break your teeth is an irreparable disfigurement," suggested one of the others.

"But you are wandering from the point," broke in Mrs. Carter, "and that is Miss Grey's gown. There is not much time to be lost, for the ball is in a fortnight, is it not?"

"And there is a good deal of work in a dress," added Mary, and we shall only have the evenings to devote to it."

"In spite of the sash," laughed Ursula.

"I can design better than sew," said Susie, "but I will do my best."

"We all will," echoed the girls, for Ursula was a favourite in the boarding-house.

"You are all so good to me," she exclaimed gratefully. "It will make my treat a double-sized one to go to it with so much friendliness and helpfulness sewn into my frock. I can't thank you all enough, girls."

And then they all had to hasten off to their varied employments. Josephine Riddell to her cookery and Susie to the Slade School; Ursula to her typewriting, and Mary to her shop. A brave band of workers, but rather a sad one to those who looked on. For girlish shoulders are not strong enough to carry the heavy burdens of poverty and hardship and work, and girls' dreams should not all be stamped on the examination papers, or framed in certificates of merit. But Ursula's work that day was all different-coloured in the light of this coming, crowning joy. Girls who are accustomed to enjoyment as a right and pleasure as a portion of their daily employment could have no idea of what the promise of this one evening's gaiety meant to Ursula; but most women will understand how

the underlying hope of meeting a particular person transforms ordinary pleasure into real happiness with the sweet magic of its touch.

"It will come right again, and be as it was before," so danced the message across the page of Ursula's typewriting; "or else," clicked the machine, "not quite as it was before, but infinitely dearer and better in a new relationship and the dawning of a brighter day." And the hope grew stronger and bigger and more real all through the long working hours, and carried Ursula on its silver wings above the grind, and toil and heat, till she forgot how her back and head and fingers ached, and read with shining eyes bright-pictured stories into the dull pages of her copy. Perhaps rich people never know the full pleasure of such a shopping excursion as Ursula and her girl friends arranged for their next free afternoon. The planning to buy much with little, and to lay out the tiny capital to fullest advantage. The delight of finding that some things were a little less expensive than had been feared, and the earnest consultations as to what constituted necessities and what could overlap into the joyful column of extravagances. They were so merry over it as they sought out cheap shops, and pictured all the beauty of rai-

ment which was to be created by their skillful fingers out of their simple purchases. They saw dresses in windows and thought they had learned how to reproduce them. It all looked so simple in imagination. And as we value most what costs most, so the coming pleasure was enhanced immeasurably in Ursula's heart by all that the preparations for it had cost her. Middle-day dinner of only coffee and rolls in an A.B.C. shop; long hours of work when she was almost asleep; a hundred calculations, and schemes till her head was puzzled and her purse emptied. But the result of it all filled the girls in Warwick Street with immense delight. It was not much of a dress; the gauze looked poorer and thinner over the sateen foundation than they had pictured to themselves, and there was no style about it whatever, but Ursula and her friends saw none of these imperfections. To them it was all that it should be, and Ursula's eyes filled with tears of gratitude when on the night of the ball she went up into her room to dress, and found the new frock laid out in state awaiting her, with shoes painted white, and gloves cleaned into newness, as a surprise, a spray of real white flowers and maiden-hair fern, subscribed for as a present from all the inmates of the boarding-

house. The powdering of the hair was rather a difficulty, but with a flour-dredger they managed to get a white effect, though they all decided that Ursula's soft dark hair looked much better in its natural condition. When all the preparations were complete there was a little reception held in the sitting-room for general admiration.

"How lovely you are!" exclaimed Mary Wilkinson, as Ursula stood with shining eyes and cheeks burnt crimson with excitement.

"You look somehow like an angel," Susie said thoughtfully as she took in the whole effect with her artist's eye, "but your face is better than your dress after all, dear, even though it is so thin and small. It has such perfect proportions and the curve of the outline is so good, to say nothing of those great, beautiful, grey eyes."

Ursula laughed brightly. The simple flattery and appreciation were so delightful to her hungry, girlish heart.

"I should like to paint you," continued the little artist, "with just that starry look you have to-night. I never saw it in you before, Miss Grey."

"Dress makes such a difference," said practical Josephine. "Nobody could look starry in an old serge skirt and a cotton shirt."

"It isn't all dress," and Susie shook her head. "It is the expression of something immortal. I can't tell where it lies, only I see it."

"Something immortal, did you say?" and Ursula's face grew sweeter with the seriousness of a great happiness. "Perhaps you are right after all. What is best in life must surely be immortal, and when we see it the light of immortality may be reflected on our faces."

"I don't call this very suitable conversation for the night of a ball," interrupted Josephine. "Miss Grey will go off feeling quite depressed."

"No, I shan't," replied Ursula, smiling again, while Susie still regarded her critically.

"White suits you extremely well, Miss Grey," and Mrs. Carter adjusted a fold here and there. "There is nothing like white for a girl. I should not wonder if this were to prove a most momentous evening in your life."

Ursula also hoped that it might, and in the joy of that thought she stooped and kissed the faded little woman beside her.

"I wish you could all share my treat," she said earnestly, "you have all been so good to me."

"It will be a treat to us to hear about it tomorrow," said Mary Wilkinson.

"You must remember every little detail to tell us," added Josephine. "It will be a real fairy-tale to us."

"And you the Cinderella at the ball," observed Susie. "I hope you will find your prince there, too."

"Nonsense!" laughed Ursula. But all the way she was driving in the cab the old fairy-tale about Merton that she imagined in her childish days rang in her ears. And she built a glorious, white castle in the air that her prince was in disguise no longer, but would that very night show her the open door of his kingdom and lead her in to rule there forever with him.

A few minutes later the ball had begun. The house was turned into a garden of white roses, and it seemed to Ursula's dazzled eyes as if some snow queen had stepped down into the middle of hot, dusty London and brought her court for one evening's revel there. Big blocks of ice stood in the midst of the flower-banks and soft-coloured lights shone through them. The crowd of well-dressed girls with frosted hair and snow-white frocks flitted through the rooms on fairy feet, and the flashing diamonds of the chaperons gleamed as wondrous icicles in the blaze of the electric light. Ursula had never even imagined

so fair a sight, and the thrill of excitement kindled by it made her shiver with a glad tremulousness, and a sob of pure happiness caught in her throat as she saw Merton coming towards her with a welcoming smile.

"Oh, Merton! It's like heaven," she exclaimed eagerly. "I can hardly believe that I am really here."

A cloud passed over the young man's face.

"It's not bad," he answered constrainedly. "Only don't be so awfully keen, Ursula. It sounds silly."

The girl looked up quickly. She wondered why Merton was not pleased. But great was her faith in him still.

"I am rather a country cousin, I am afraid," and her face grew wistful, "but it is such a treat to me, you know, Merton. And I owe it all to you. I never imagined just a party could be so beautiful."

"I don't care for these white balls myself," and Merton's voice was a little affected; "the girls all look so much alike."

"I think it is exquisite; and if the girls are alike, Merton, it is because they all look so lovely."

"The Mandevilles look better with their golden

hair showing," observed Merton. "It is a shame to powder such glorious hair as theirs."

"I was afraid when I first read your letter about a white ball that I could not come, because, you know, my only evening frock is mauve. But the girls in the boarding-house have been so kind to me, and helped me to make this one. How do you like it, Merton?" And Ursula's voice rang with the joy of perfect confidence.

"Oh!—all right!" in an embarrassed voice, "let us dance now, Ursula. Come on."

And for a few brief moments the girl's cup was full. She felt the pressure of Merton's arm as she glided in perfect harmony with him over the glassy floor, and under the snowy arches of flowers, with the wonderful music of the Hungarian band in her ears, and the mystery of her own happiness throbbing in her heart.

So full was she of the strange beauty of it all that she forgot to notice how silent her partner was until they paused for breath, and stood on the outskirts for a moment watching the dazzling crowd whirl by. Another couple stood beside them, and when Ursula came back from her glorious dreams to speak to Merton she saw that he was talking in an undertone to the girl beside

them. An exquisitely dressed girl with a laughing face and merry eyes.

"Where are you to find me, Mr. Wainwright?" she was saying. "I suppose beside mother, or else in the conservatory, or perhaps on the stairs, or else on the balcony. Oh, it will be quite easy to find me."

"Will it? I am not so sure of that," and Merton half smiled.

"Then you ought to be," and the girl glanced up at him with an arch look.

"Who is that girl?" asked Ursula, as the others resumed their dance.

"Violet Mandeville," and Merton's voice softened as the name passed his lips.

"She is very pretty," continued his partner, but the young man did not answer. His eyes were following the graceful moving figure, and as the girl stopped again right opposite them, she looked across the room with a little smile, and Merton's face flushed and his eyes smiled back the understanding which each found in the other. And as Ursula, who was always quick to follow Merton's thoughts, looked also towards the girl, her eyes were arrested by another figure; and it was a moment before she realised that the strange, shabby-looking girl with skimped skirt and tousled

floury hair was indeed her own reflection in the large mirror opposite. Numberless couples flashed across its bright surface, but yet behind them all stood that queerly-dressed figure, with a ghastly white face and deep pain filled eyes. For Ursula as she looked, saw and understood. She did not know that the pallor of her face was partly due to the fact that all the other poudré girls were delicately rouged and touched up, she only saw the immense difference between her appearance and theirs, and she knew that Merton saw it, too, and what it would mean in his beauty-loving eyes. The sheeny satin and glittering trimming of the rich girl's Paris gown made the poor one's simple homemade gauze one ugly by comparison; the exquisite spray of carefully wired flowers on Violet's shoulders contrasted cruelly with the faded rose and shrivelled maiden-hair at Ursula's waist. The former's daintily powdered and dressed hair showed how great a failure the latter's attempts had been in this direction. But as the full bitterness of the contrast beat into Ursula's brain, it was doubled by the knowledge that her appearance was not really so strangely at fault. That her face was as good to look at in its way as that of this dazzling girl herself. Her great, grey eyes more beautiful even than the

merry, blue ones; her small, finely-cut features and pathetic mouth more perfect from an artist's point of view than Violet's piquante, irregular face; and her figure as slim and graceful. It was only because one was poor and the other rich that this hideous difference was possible. If she could have been dressed by Violet's dressmaker and maid she would have been as fair in Merton's eyes as the other girl was now, and he would have been as proud of her for a partner. She understood now why he had been vexed at seeing her, and her girlish heart cried out in the sudden hurt of learning the truth. Merton was ashamed of her, and she did not blame him for it. As an outsider she watched the mirror and she saw how utter and almost grotesque a stranger she looked in this world of beauty and fashion and wealth; a world which had become Merton's in the fulfilling of his life's ideal, and in which she now saw for the first time she had no place. And all because she was poor. The knowledge of her own sweet face, and her gentle birth, and all the tender little graces with which nature had endowed her to make up, as it were, for hard work and humble surroundings, curved her parched lips into a bitter smile, for all availed nothing in this world's eyes without money to buy an entrance

ticket and as expensive clothes as the other inmates wore therein. So a great scorn took possession of Ursula's soul—scorn of a life wherein such things as money meant so much—scorn of a love which could be weakened and destroyed by such a poor thing as fashion, for she knew now why Merton had drifted away from her and ceased to care for her as he did in the old days when she was better dressed than his sisters in the little Winstow world—scorn even of a God who could allow such piteous gulfs to exist, and let a girl's heart be broken, and her life spoiled, for such a small thing as an adequate dress allowance.

"Shall we go on now?" Merton's voice was saying. He saw no difference in Ursula, during the last few minutes, knew nothing of the opening of her blind eyes, and the scorching of her glad young spirit. But then he was thinking entirely of the other girl; admiring her dazzling appearance, thrilling at the sound of her merry voice, and building with panting excitement a glorious castle of his own, of which Violet Mandeville should be the queen. He had seen with the quickness of a lover's eye, woven into the lovely flower spray which Violet wore, a little rosebud tipped with the brownness of a bruise;

and he knew that it was the buttonhole he had given her in the morning, and which she would not part with, even though it faded and died amid the fresh fairness of the costly wreath which lay across the shoulder of her dress.

"I would rather sit down," answered Ursula, and her voice sounded to herself as if it came from far away; "I feel a little tired."

"You are not used to balls, you see," and Merton spoke a trifle impatiently. He was annoyed with Ursula for looking as she did, and he was always vexed when her weakness worried him or interfered with any of their plans. He felt now it was so silly of her to have such a splendid treat and to doubly spoil it, both by her dress and then by feeling tired directly the enjoyment of it had begun. Deep down in his heart Merton was a little uneasy concerning his treatment of Ursula, and as a salve to his conscience he had asked for this invitation for her, and he was distinctly irritated by the look of misery on her face when he felt she ought to be full of delight, and so owe him a debt for her happiness instead of making him feel an uncomfortable consciousness that he was causing her pain.

"No, I am not used to your world, Merton," she said slowly.

"Things change so, you see, Ursula," and his forehead wrinkled. "A fellow can't help himself, can he?"

"I suppose not."

"And you change yourself, somehow, too. But I can't see how it is your own fault. It seems to me nobody can help it."

"Yes, things change," and she spoke wearily, "without its being any one's fault."

"I am glad to hear you say so," he interrupted eagerly. "You might even not want to change, and yet be unable to help it. You can see that, can't you?"

"Oh, yes! I can see it, clearly enough."

Merton's face brightened. He so hated to be disapproved of, and to feel that he was doing anything which deserved it.

"You are awfully sensible, Ursula. So many girls are not, and it makes it so difficult to get them to understand things."

"What kind of things?" and the girl shivered slightly, even though the night air which crept in behind them through the open windows was so soft and warm.

"Oh! I don't know," and Merton spoke vaguely. Then his face suddenly changed and he laid an almost imploring hand upon her knee.

"I used to tell you things, Ursula, and you always understood. You will again, won't you?"

"I expect so," and a faint hope fluttered in the girl's heart at his confidential tone.

"You have always been—a sister to me," and the young man's face flushed with some lurking sense of shame, "and I want to tell you about—about Violet," his voice sinking into a whisper.

"Yes?"

"It is such a new feeling, Ursula. So wonderful and strong and humbling, and all that kind of thing, don't you know? And I believe she—she likes me a little—though it seems impossible that such a girl—you can see the sort she is from her looks—could care for a nobody like me."

"You are not a nobody, Merton."

"Oh, yes! I am—compared to her. She is a perfect queen and she is always the best dressed girl in the room wherever she may be."

An icy little smile froze on Ursula's lips.

"And does that make a girl a queen? Then royalty can be bought and sold at a dressmaker's or milliner's."

"You don't know how that kind of thing appeals to a man," argued Merton hotly. "It's awfully nice to be seen with a girl who looks like that—but when she—she might perhaps

even belong to you, it's—it's simply maddening! Only it makes one feel oneself such an awkward cub."

"You never felt that before, did you, Merton?"

"No, never," and he laughed slightly. "But everything's different now."

"Yes, everything's different now," echoed the girl bitterly.

"I must go!" exclaimed Merton suddenly hearing the sounds of fresh music, "it is my dance with Her," and Ursula heard the capital letter in his voice. "What will you do?"

"I will stay here for a few minutes longer. You need not bother about me. I shall be all right," and she spoke proudly.

"I shall speak to-night, if I dare," whispered Merton. "Wish me success, Ursula, for old friendship's sake." Merton thought that by continually repeating the statement that he and Ursula had never been anything but friends he converted it into a fact. And indeed he had already convinced himself of the truth of it. Then he hurried away without waiting for the answer which Ursula's parched lips had failed to frame. And he never came back to her again. Shrinking into a more secluded corner she sat on alone.

Alone, as she had never been before even in her lonely country wanderings, for Nature does not desert man as man deserts his brother. There is no need to be introduced to her before she outpours her lavish hospitality. Ursula was alone, in cruel exile, on the fringe of this gay world; and the air was full of the swelling strains of the Hungarian music which rose and rushed and sang as the wind through the leaves of a forest, and was lost now and then in the merry voices and laughter of the careless crowd. And burned into her eyeballs was the picture of that pathetically grotesque figure which she had seen in the mirror, and seared into her heart was the bitter knowledge that at last Merton Wainwright, like the prince in the old-world fairy-tale, "had entered into his kingdom and shut the door," but she was left outside all by herself. "And for the lack of the golden key which men call wealth," she added in her bitterness.

The fashionable folk trooped down to supper, but she was unnoticed and ignored. Nobody saw her, though occasionally a few words of desultory conversation floated into her hearing from the couples who strolled by.

"Pretty girls, these Mandevilles! But plenty of them to get off for Lady Clem."

"That is why they are going to let Violet have the private secretary. He is a very good-looking young man."

"And old Mandeville will find him a berth somewhere, I suppose. He is a clever fellow."

"I always knew one of the girls would fall in love with him," continued the lady in soft, drawling tones. "I told Lady Clementina so at the first—but she only laughed. She always does, you know, at everything. I believe if one of the girls wanted to marry a sweep she would go into fits of laughter and say how fortunate it was that they could now get their chimneys swept in the family."

And their voices died away as they disappeared. The knowledge that Merton was going to marry Violet seemed nothing new. Indeed Ursula felt she could hardly remember a time when she had not known it. Once or twice the feeling swept over her that this must all be a dream, and she should wake directly to the warmth and sunshine of the old life of hope. She shut her eyes, then tried with pathetic patience to open them on to a different scene than this cruelly beautiful one; but alas! it was her happiness now that was the dream and her misery the awakening.

"I say," chirped a boyish voice, "what a lucky

devil Wainwright is! The lovely Vi will dance with no one else to-night."

"They are engaged, I believe. Though it isn't exactly out yet. It's my opinion the thing has only just been settled," and the other boy stroked the place where his moustache would not make sufficient haste to grow.

"I hate him!" said the first one gloomily.

"Don't be an ass, Tim."

"'Tisn't as if he were a decent match, you know. Eldest son, or somebody like that, which always fetches a girl and puts us poor beggars out of the running. But he's got no people, else they're only for private circulation. You know the sort. It's a beastly shame how some fellows always get the plums."

"I saw him dancing with an awful rum kind of a girl when I arrived, with a frock of damp tissue paper, and a face like a ghost. Perhaps a sister?"

"Don't know," replied Tim sulkily. "Believe it *was* a ghost, for I've never seen her since," and he laughed shortly.

"Ripping girls the Mandevilles, and always so jolly well up to things."

"It's all very well for you talking like that. But I can tell you it's pretty sickening when you

ask the only girl you care for to dance and she says her programme is full when you know it isn't."

"Oh! rot, about the only girl you care for! There's loads of others; and if you must have a Mandeville there are plenty more of them. Here's Blanche out now, besides the kids upstairs."

"Dash the kids upstairs!" exclaimed the blighted youth angrily. "As if a fellow could console himself with them. What an ass you are, Dick!"

"Come on, old chap. It's the lancers next. Bags me in your set, and we'll have kitchen ones."

Tim's face brightened.

"All right. Mind you get no dowagers in, they are all so beastly straight-laced."

"Bar Lady Clem ——"

And then they disappeared and Ursula heard no more.

"I believe it was a ghost," she repeated to herself with a hard, unchildish smile. "The ghost of a girl who once was happy before she knew the exact market value of a fine frock in the eyes of the world. A value infinitely above what I ever dreamed even fortunes could buy." So bit-

ter thoughts leapt up in her sore spirit, and robbed her of all her faith and hope and love, and she sat on unconscious of everything except the new misery which seemed wrapt in a pall of white flowers, the scent of which for long afterwards sickened her with memories of that evening's bitter experience.

When at last it was all over and Ursula driving back alone through the familiar streets, which looked so unfamiliar in the soft, grey light of dawn, she began to feel how physically faint and exhausted she was. She looked mistily at the clean white programme with only Merton's initials written opposite the first dance, and then with cold trembling fingers she tore it across and dropped it through the cab's open window. As she wearily mounted the stairs which led to her attic bedroom, eager faces peeped out through the open doors.

"How did you enjoy it?"

"What was it like?"

"Tell about the party," clamoured the impatient voices, and Ursula, looking at the kindly faces and remembering their untiring efforts for her enjoyment in that long-ago yesterday, resolved that they should not be disappointed, too.

"It was a perfect dream of beauty," she answered brightly. "Far more lovely than I ever imagined. It will take hours to describe it all."

"I wish I had been there in some hidden corner to see you dancing," exclaimed Mary Wilkinson.

"I am simply longing to hear all about it," said Josephine. "We have been talking about you all the evening, and trying to picture you having your splendid time and being one of the grand ladies at the ball."

"How clean you have kept your dress and shoes," observed Mrs. Carter, a quaint object in a crumpled old dressing-gown with a wisp of grey hair screwed up into a knob above her withered, grey face. "But I suppose grand houses like that are kept free from smuts and dust?"

"It was more like a snow palace than a London house," replied Ursula, seeing, with her tired, tearless eyes, the great gulf which poverty draws between houses as well as lives, "only the snow was of flowers and the icicles of precious stones."

"How wonderful!" And Susie's sleepy face lit up with the idea.

"But you are looking very fagged," said Mary; "can't I get you anything, Miss Grey?"

"Some water, please," gasped Ursula, as she felt a sudden faintness—perhaps from hunger, perhaps from hopelessness—sweep over her.

"Of course she is fagged," added Josephine, while Mary flew for the water, "and thirsty. There is no more thirsty work than dancing, especially on a hot night like this."

"Tell us more about yourself, Miss Grey," begged Mrs. Carter, when Ursula had drained the glass, "what you enjoyed most, and who were all your partners? It is the correct thing to count up your conquests on the night of a ball, I have always heard."

Ursula laughed a dead little laugh.

"But perhaps there are things she doesn't want to tell," chimed in Susie. "I always think the nicest things won't bear telling."

"And how did your dress look amongst the others?" asked Mary, lovingly stroking out its scant folds.

"I want to thank you all for helping me make it," answered Ursula quickly. "I could never have gone to the ball if you had not all been so good to me."

Then something in the girl's face caused Susie

to exclaim, "But you are looking so tired, Miss Grey, we must not keep you talking here. You ought to go to bed at once for you have to be up early just the same."

"And I expect you have danced several miles," added Josephine. "We don't realise that."

"I wish you need not have gone to work to-morrow," and Mary's kind face clouded over.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Ursula, who felt that nothing would ever matter again; "we working girls have to go on—until we drop, I suppose, and it is no use expecting anything different."

"A peep into fairyland makes a typewriting office seem dull, no doubt," said Josephine dryly.

"Ah! you should all work at the Slade," and Susie smiled with the pure happiness of an artist, "and then you would find out that there is no pleasure to be compared with creative work, and that the fairyland lies in your own imagination, and nothing can rob you of that."

"We cannot all be as clever as you," said Ursula's lips, but her eyes were looking far away into that fairyland of which some one had robbed her. And long after the others had fallen asleep again the girl lay wearily watching the growing light and wondering why it could

be that some lives should overflow with happiness and others be starved of even the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table. A restlessness of misery possessed her till the sight of the few faded flowers touched by the first gleams of sunlight which crept through the blind, suddenly brought a lump in her throat and a rush of tears into her eyes.

"The same white flowers are used for weddings and funerals," she whispered with quivering lips, "and these are funeral flowers, not wedding ones as the girls so innocently thought when they bought them for me. For to-night I have buried my faith in man and God. I do not believe any more in love, so there is nothing left to make earth beautiful or heaven real. Love!" and bitter tears rolled down her wan face, "is only a fantastic name for something which money can buy, and rich people play with. I could not pay its price and so I lost it. That is all. And the God that lets His gifts be ticketed and priced, shall not be my God. I do not believe," and here she stretched out pleading hands, "that there can be a God of Love at all or else He could not be so cruel."

So Ursula, as countless others in their ignorance have done before her, turned in defiance

towards God for the suffering which man has wrought, and let the blindness of anguish shut out the heavenly vision.

The murky atmosphere soon shrouded the summer sun and a heavy, hot fog hung over the working world of London which has to be up and out so long before west-end breakfasts are ready. As Ursula went out into it she was almost too tired to wonder whether the streets could really be the same as those which had used to be lined with all the girlish daydreams and hopes of the past few weeks; too stunned to realise that her old self was slain and a new, bitter, miserable Ursula born in its stead. The sultry clouds which covered the sky seemed to have sunk also into her soul and blotted out all the beauty she had once seen. Blue sky, sunset colours, shining stars all forgotten because of that heavy pall of smoke which the hot, lifeless air was too tired to raise. And in a dim way Ursula felt that it was a picture of her life, only Nature's clouds would roll away but those which darkened her horizon had come to stay. So does life look when we pass through its shadows, and our dim faith falters because of our blurred sight. It is in hours such as these that we need to cry with the sufferers of old that our eyes

may be opened; so that He who passes by may again stand still, and, having compassion upon us, touch our eyes, that we, having received our sight, may follow Him.

CHAPTER XII

INTO THE VALLEY

It was only a few days after the Mandevilles' ball that Ursula received a letter from Merton, though to her it seemed more like many months. A letter full of himself, just as all Merton's letters were wont to be, only hitherto Ursula had rejoiced in them for that very reason.

"Dear Ursula," it ran, "such a wonderful thing has happened. I am engaged to Violet Mandeville. I can hardly believe in my good fortune, for I dared not really hope she would ever have me. I am almost wild with delight, only of course I have to hide it rather for fear of making a fool of myself. I mean before the others. Violet doesn't think me a fool, though she calls me a silly boy. Isn't it dear of her? I am awfully glad I am such a clever fellow because it is that which makes Mr. Mandeville willing to give his consent—and it is a tremendous piece of luck, too; for, of course, as his son-in-law, I shall have a splendid chance of getting on.

I was in such a funk when I had to ask him. Violet was, rather, as well; though she is much too plucky ever to show when she minds about anything. She despises people who do, so I never shall again. It is much better bred not to, I find. I need not tell you anything about Violet because you saw her for yourself at the ball, so you know how lovely she is and how perfectly she dresses, and what a lucky fellow I am. The last two days have been ripping. I always thought the world a jolly place, but this just beats everything. I am going into the country with the Mandevilles for Sunday, and to Kerriesort Lodge, their place in the far north of Scotland next month for my holiday which I am taking then. So I am pretty busy and afraid I shan't be able to see you again before I go. Excuse rather a hurried letter.

"Yours in haste,

"MERTON WAINWRIGHT.

"P. S. I am so sorry I never saw you again at the ball. It was all this happening that made me forget my duties, and I expect my manners, too. But you will make allowances for the special circumstances and forgive me, I know. Hope you got on all right."

"I would rather be forgotten than remembered only as a duty or for good manners," said the girl proudly to herself as she tore up the letter. And then she wondered why it was that she could tear up a letter from Merton with so little regret. She had never done so before. She even smiled half-scornfully at the small selfishness of its tone, and felt no active pain at the new realisation that her fear was now a fact, and Merton's affection for herself but a forgotten dream.

"What a fool I have been to believe in the old things," she thought bitterly. "To ever have imagined that I—a poor, badly-dressed working girl—could be cared for in that one, best way that only fills a woman's life. Why did no one teach me that because I was poor I could never afford to buy happiness, and so must live and die in the dull joylessness of a life of nothing but work? It was cruel to let me be so ignorant as to look forward to the kind of life that other girls have. Why, why, did no one tell me before I grew to care so much? It wouldn't have been so hard then to give it all up. But I must work on now in this great, grinding machine of toil, which is my life, and grow accustomed to it. There is no time even to cry, except out of my

hours for sleep," she added bitterly in the chilled numbness of a frozen heart.

But Ursula's apathy was perhaps as much the result of physical as of mental hurt. A lurking fever, on the lookout for frail forms and lowered vitality, had already clutched her by the throat; and in a few hours' time from the receipt of Merton's letter the girl had to give up her work and go to bed. Mrs. Carter was filled with distress and dismay, and when on the following day the doctor was summoned and pronounced the illness to be of the most infectious character, great consternation ran through the whole boarding-house.

"Let me go to a hospital," pleaded Ursula, shrinking from the fear of giving trouble and causing expense.

"I would rather not send you without your people's consent," said the doctor, and he looked compassionately at the poor lonely little suffering girl, "but I will telegraph at once and ascertain their wishes about you."

"They are just starting abroad, if they have not already gone," said Ursula; "but David Carpenter at the Winstow Grammar School will know their address. Telegraph to him and he will send it on."

"It isn't that I would not do everything for her," and Mrs. Carter meant what she said; for Ursula had grown very dear to the hard-working little woman, whose life was so empty of interest and love. "But you see, doctor, it is the danger to the other boarders and the damage to the whole house."

"Yes, yes, of course, Mrs. Carter. But the long vacation is just beginning, and this girl's parents might wish her to stay here. You would be fully recompensed, no doubt. She is going to be pretty bad, I am afraid, poor child!"

"It is very good of you, dear Mrs. Carter, to want to help me," and Ursula met her with a smile as she reëntered the room. "But don't trouble yourself. There is no infection yet, and I am sure that the answer from my father and stepmother will be that I am to be taken to a hospital at once."

"But supposing it does you harm," sighed the matron with a characteristic want of tact; "they would never forgive themselves if anything happened to you in consequence, I should think."

"Oh, yes, they would!" and Ursula faintly smiled. "Georgina has very strong views of her own about everything, and nothing that happens afterwards ever disconcerts her."

"Well, I cannot bear the thought of your being sent off to a great, cheerless hospital all among strangers, my dear. I always have such a horror of hospitals myself. It should not be done if you were my child."

"Perhaps it would not be done if I were her child, either," replied Ursula quietly, "but I am not, you know. That makes a great difference."

"There always seems to me something so very dreary about dying in a hospital," continued Mrs. Carter dolefully, "with no chance of a nice deathbed scene with all your relations sent for, and everything comfortable and homelike. It is more like dying in prison, or as if some disgrace were attached to it almost like hanging."

"But I may not die," suggested Ursula with a glint of laughter in her eyes.

"Oh! well, my dear, of course we must hope for the best," and Mrs. Carter's voice expressed but little confidence in such a hope. "Only it so puts me in mind of the case of a niece of my late husband's, who was removed into a hospital, when governess in a nobleman's family, and died there. And never so much as one of her relations was even allowed to see the corpse. We never knew for certain, but we had reason to believe, that she suffered terribly, poor thing,

and was scolded accordingly. Those nurses in uniform are so terribly strict."

"Are they?"

"There is something in their white cap strings that fairly puts me in a tremble," continued the matron confidingly, "and their aprons even have a stern aspect. To me it seems that it is just when people are ill that they want petting a little. But you won't get that in hospital, my dear." And Mrs. Carter stood looking at Ursula while big tears of sympathy rolled down her withered cheeks.

"I don't know what petting feels like," and Ursula's thickened voice quivered, "so I shan't miss it. And—and don't fret about me, dear Mrs. Carter. I do not mind going in the very least. I think all my minding power is used up," she added half to herself, "and so nothing can ever matter again."

"She will never get over it," Mrs. Carter told the girls downstairs. "She talks like one who is stricken for death. Poor girl! How fond we have all been of her!"

"But perhaps she will get better?" suggested Josephine.

"I feel so sorry for her having no holiday just when we are all starting off for ours," said Susie.

"I am going into the country for five weeks' sketching, and I shall hate to think of poor Miss Grey ill in bed in London all the time."

"Ah, but she may have passed away long before then," exclaimed Mrs. Carter. "The danger develops very quickly in cases like hers, I know."

All during that long afternoon, Ursula struggled to fight against the fever which was wrapping her more firmly in its folds, and to forget none of the many instructions which it was necessary to give Mrs. Carter concerning her work, and all the other arrangements which her absence through a long illness would involve.

"Rest your poor head for a few minutes, my dear, do," begged the kind-hearted little woman, alarmed at the deepening flush on the girl's face and the glitter in her eyes.

"But if I give way now I shall not be ready to be moved when the answer comes," said Ursula bravely. "And it would vex my father for there to be any hitch if Georgina has arranged it. Besides there are so many things that must be thought of before I go away."

"It is all right," said the doctor coming at last into the room, with almost a look of relief on his kind face. "I have received instructions for you to remain here, Miss Grey, and to have

two nurses who will arrive directly. All the other boarders are to leave, and you, Mrs. Carter, shall be no loser both during Miss Grey's illness, and in the matter of the house's being thoroughly put right afterwards."

Ursula looked puzzled for a moment; and then the strain of keeping up snapped, and her eyes filled with tears. "I wonder why they are so good to me?" she murmured.

"So there is nothing for you to worry about now," said the doctor soothingly, his fingers on her bounding pulse.

"How funny!" and Ursula smiled weakly. "There has always been something for me to worry about, you know."

"But you must not do so just now. Here is Nurse Morgan come to see after you. And we only want you to lie still. For we shall have to keep you a prisoner for a little while, you know."

Ursula looked up at the kindly face which the new nurse bent over her. A face full of compassion for suffering and of tender readiness to help the sufferer.

Not enough is said, perhaps not even enough is thought, of the great, self-sacrificing work which that brave band of women, called nurses, are so willing to take upon their shoulders.

Young women, to whom life should be full of sunshine, and whose minds turn naturally to pleasant thoughts, yet come of their own free will with helpful ministry into dark sick-rooms, and tarry awhile with those who are drawing nigh to the shadow of death. Mere girls, some of them, grown old with hard experience of others' pain; made tender with the cries of others' need; giving so readily their youth and playtime to cheer and comfort those who are sick. And afterwards, as women, dedicating their mother hearts of tenderness and sympathy to those who lie, helpless as little children, within their care. It may be that faults and failings sometimes mar the absolute perfectness of their work; but who of us never falls short of the ideal which consecrates human effort? And far above the chorus of gratitude, which so many are ready to swell in remembrance of the untiring kindness which our nurses have shown to us in days of sickness long gone by, there is the stamp and seal of the sacredness of their work in the great "Inasmuch" which makes their ministry an immortal one.

"I am come to take care of you," the nurse said softly, laying a pitying hand on Ursula's burning brow.

"I have never been taken care of in my life before that I can remember," answered the girl simply. "The idea of it seems quite strange."

"Well, I am going to take care of you, now."

"Thank you, nurse. How nice it sounds! I am rather tired. I think I want to go to sleep."

But the sleep that Ursula wanted did not come to her just then. For days and nights the cruel pain gripped her throat and kept her weakly fighting for her breath. The nurse moved silently about the darkened room, and the doctor came often and not always alone. Sweet flowers, smelling of the country, were brought up fresh every morning, and big blocks of ice carried in to cool the scorched air, for summer was at the height of its heat just then. But Ursula noticed none of these things. For that sad, pathetic figure on the bed, with lips parched by fever and eyes glazed with pain, was not the real Ursula at all. By the wonderful mystery of revelation she learned that she herself was quite independent of that suffering body, and that the strong, glad life of the soul is untouched by sickness just as it is unhurt by death. All her old efforts after faith and religion melted into nothingness at the touch of God Himself, and her tired spirit was healed and rested as

with the sleep of a little child. That she was going to die she firmly believed, and the wonder was that death,—the fearful shadow which haunts so many souls—should seem, as she drew near to it, so simple and so sweet a thing. In the light which shone down into her whole being from the half-opened door of the beyond she saw things as they really are, and she glowed with a new happiness as the vision brought her the glad knowledge that all that is beautiful is immortal, and only the ugly and cruel experiences to be left behind. Down yonder with that body of pain lay all the little unkindnesses that used to hurt,—all that made life bitter, and earth sordid, and faith dim. She just lay still, hushed by the peace which is not of this world, and yet the best joy of it was that she felt perfectly at home in it, and knew that it was her native air. She forgot to say any prayers for she was listening to what God had to say to her; and once when she heard the nurse's voice reading a Psalm she smiled to herself, just as one might smile over reading a letter together with the writer when all separation has come to an end. She had always thought so much for herself and carried such heavy burdens of responsibility; now she saw how needless had been all that fret and toil.

She stretched out her hands in the confiding helplessness of a little child, so that all fears and cares were stilled. There came to her, too, during those sweet, mysterious hours when time seemed as if it had ceased to beat, and all outward signs of it faded from her notice, the knowledge that the strangeness which men fear so much in death did not exist for her. That there was no strangeness either in herself or in that life which lies beyond earth's limitations. That she, whether she lived or died, would still be the same Ursula, who would be glad and sorry in the old familiar ways; who would laugh at humour and be touched by pathos just as she had always been accustomed to do. That the beauty of God's garment in His creation of worlds would still flood her soul with an awesome delight whether she saw it reflected in the sunset over the hills at home, or breaking into fresh fairness wherewith to make glad the City and Paradise of God. And she learned at last something of the meaning of love, and smiled with tender pity both for herself and Merton that they should have tried so hard to manufacture it for themselves out of the bits of material they had at hand. She for him, and he for Violet Mandeville. For the love which is God's

touch upon the souls which He has made for love needs no patchwork of ours to make it perfect—but stands, as all His gifts, in its own purity and depth and strength for time and for eternity. The memory of the ball looked to her cleared vision as the trouble of a broken joy in nursery days, and the riches she craved for then as the banked-up sweetmeats in the window of a village shop.

To some souls the revelation of the Eternal Love comes through the fragments of it which fill most lives on earth, from the dawn of a mother's tenderness to the full noonday of a heart's romance. But as for others, and such was Ursula, their blind eyes are first opened to the vision of the Christ, and then they learn to look and see His touch in everything which makes life happy and hope bright.

So Ursula drew very near to the Borderland, and her soul was eager to go across, that she might find her home in the blessed realisation of the nearness and goodness of God. But she had yet to learn that there is no going across necessary, seeing that He has already come to us; bringing the new life, which must be born in us just as truly on this side the grave as the other, which instantly opens to all believers the king-

dom of heaven. A cry of disappointment rose to her lips, for she was almost there, and it seemed hard to have to turn back; but God never misunderstands. It was with the dear old feeling of being put to bed as a tired child that He hushed her then to sleep; and when she awoke it was morning and she was young and bright and happy again.

"Are you feeling a little better?" asked Nurse Morgan's gentle voice.

"I am quite well, I think," said Ursula with a smile, "now the pain has gone."

"Well, hardly that, Miss Grey. But you are going to do well now."

"I have been doing well all this long time," murmured the girl dreamily. "It almost seems dull just at first to be going to get better after all."

"Oh, no! You must not say that. You are wanted badly here."

For Nurse Morgan had seen the anguish on David Carpenter's face when the news she brought down to him was bad, and, being a woman who knew the secret of love, she read the story of his.

"I think you are mistaken, nurse," said Ursula wistfully, "but of course God knows best, and I want more than everything else to do His will."

For Ursula did not know that David had come.

"What lovely flowers!" she exclaimed the next day as a fresh bunch of white roses was brought in. "Does the doctor bring them?"

"No, Miss Grey."

"Then where do they come from? It seems a little extravagant of somebody."

"Mr. Carpenter brings them every morning when he calls to ask after you first. And he told me to put a piece of this verbena every day on your pillow."

Ursula's white face flushed.

"How good of him!" she said. "This bit of verbena has made me feel as if I were in the garden at home, and forget all about London. Tell him how I have loved it. I think I have held it in my hand all the time."

"Yes, you have. I told him, and he was so pleased."

"But why is he here?" asked Ursula presently. "I don't understand."

"He has been so anxious about you," replied the nurse quietly. And then Ursula lay still for a long, silent time and thought about David Carpenter.

The truth that it was under his direction that

she should stay where she was instead of being taken to a hospital; that doctors and nurses should see after her with no thought of economy, gradually stole into her heart. It was unlike her father and Georgina to be so anxious for her welfare, and so lavish wherever her comfort was concerned. She held the green, scented spray against her face, and inhaled its sweet breath with a new feeling of happiness. The message that it brought her of a summer in the country was good; but its message of David's thoughtful care of her was much better. She had realised through need and suffering how dear a thing it is to be taken care of; and it appealed to her just then with special force that there was somebody who cared enough to want to take charge of her still.

"He was always kind and strong," she thought to herself, "and now I am weak and helpless it was so like him to come."

"Nurse," she asked a few days afterwards, "has Mr. Carpenter been to ask after me every day?"

"Oh, yes." And Nurse Morgan smiled. "And more than once a day. Some days he has been here five or six times."

"And did he say anything about me, except just what the doctor told him?"

"Yes, Miss Grey. He used to ask me to tell him everything I could about you. How you seemed and looked ——"

"What did you say?" interrupted Ursula.

"Well, I had to tell him the truth."

"And what was that, nurse?"

"For several days, that you seemed almost unconscious of everything and every one about you, and you looked very different to your usual self."

"How different?" and the girl sat up eagerly with a heightened colour. "Tell me exactly."

"Your friends would hardly have known you," continued Nurse Morgan, "for your face was scorched with suffering and your eyes dulled of all intelligence. I never felt more sorry, I think, for any one before."

"But, nurse," exclaimed Ursula, "I was not different, however I looked. I was just the same inside. And so I want you to take this message from me to all those who are distressed by changes in the looks of their dear ones who are ill, or even dying. Tell them from me, that the real person is not changed—it is only that the body through weakness fails in expression—but the self is as real and strong and individual as ever before, and feels and knows and loves in the old familiar way. I never was so much myself

in the highest and best and most natural sense, as I was during those days I looked so changed."

"I will remember your message, Miss Grey. For I meet with so much anguish when loved voices are silent, and dear eyes unresponsive, and strong or tender hands lifeless and numb. And I never knew before how to comfort it."

"Well, you know now, nurse," and Ursula's face glowed. "I am so glad to think that perhaps I shall be able to help somebody the better for what I have myself passed through."

"You would not have been afraid to die, then?" Nurse Morgan asked curiously, as she watched the girl's sweet smile. "Or felt oppressed by your sins?"

"Afraid! Oh, nurse, I wish I knew how to explain it better! It was all so homelike that no one could be afraid. Of course I was sorry for all the wrong I have done, and all my stupidity and impatience and want of trust; but when you are sorriest for grieving any one you want to be nearest to them. I have never known what religion meant before, though I have heard so much talked about it."

"And what does it mean, Miss Grey?"

"I think just belonging to God. I remember

a text somewhere which says, 'I am Thine, O save me!' I used to think it ought to be 'Save me so that I may be Thine'; but I understand the difference at last."

"You speak with great confidence of these things?" and a little, hungry sound crept into Nurse Morgan's voice; for she had looked so long at the weakness of the physical that her eyes had grown dim to see the strength of the spiritual through.

"Only because I have seen them for myself," replied Ursula simply. "I never cannot know about them again."

The days rolled on filled with the trifling and yet important incidents which make the world of a sick-room so engrossing; and a tiny thread of strength crept back into Ursula's weak limbs. When she was able to go into an adjoining room Nurse Morgan brought word that David Carpenter would like to see her.

"Oh, yes! I want to see and thank him," exclaimed the girl eagerly. But the thanks trembled on her lips when the man, about whom she had been thinking so much, actually came into her presence; and she could only lift her tear-filled eyes to his, and stretch out her little, thin hand in silence.

"There, there, my child!" he said gently, sitting down beside her. "I know all you want to say and can't. We will count it as said."

"It makes me cry to thank you," began Ursula brokenly.

"Then you must not thank me," and he smiled. "I understand all about it, and how weak you are."

"It is silly of me, I know."

"It isn't—dear." And Ursula felt no strangeness in the fact that David should call her "dear."

"Sick people are like children, somehow," she said thoughtfully. "I feel such a very little thing."

David looked at her with a great tenderness in his eyes. "Your face is like a little child's. It reminds me of the Ursula who used to come to school. And the lessons were so hard, weren't they?"

"My lessons have always been hard. But I am going to begin all over again now and do them better."

"Poor child!"

"I like you to say that. It comforts me." And the girl's face was full of pathos.

"I want to comfort you, and help you to grow

strong again, and—and make the lessons easy for you."

"As you used to. Whenever I brought the wrong things to you, you always put them right, you know."

"Did I? But," and David smiled a trifle sadly, "you did not often bring them."

"I have always wanted to do things myself," exclaimed the girl eagerly, "because I thought I ought to. But now I am little again and can do nothing, it is good to know you will help me. You did not want to when I could fight my own battles, did you?"

"You did not need me then," replied David simply, who had never really wanted to do anything else.

"Perhaps not," and Ursula's voice grew dreamy, "but I see my mistake now. I have failed all along the line. And oh! I have tried so hard to be well and strong and successful and clever!"

"Then I am glad you failed," and David spoke under his breath.

"Glad!" echoed Ursula with a touch of reproach in her tone, "glad, when it hurt so much?"

David took her hand in his.

"Not glad in that way, dear—but—but—

don't think me a brute—glad that you want my help."

Ursula looked up with a smile.

"You are splendidly big and strong," she whispered.

"And you are such a poor, little wounded thing," as a great tenderness leapt into his eyes. "I wish I could give you my strength."

"You do, I think. For I am content now to take as a gift what I once only wanted to possess as a right. I have struggled for so long to be strong myself, but I am beginning to see now how weakness after all is better for me."

"But you are getting well all right now, aren't you?" he asked with a sudden clutch of anxiety at his heart.

"Oh, yes! And as quickly as possible." Then after a long silence she exclaimed:

"Don't you know that I am infectious, and that you are holding my hand?"

"Yes, I know!" and he laughed. "I am not afraid of infection."

"But the boys! And the holidays will soon be over?"

"I am not going back to the Grammar School this term."

"Why not?"

"Oh, for several reasons. Here comes Nurse Morgan to say I must not overtire you."

"I am not a bit tired," Ursula protested after the way of invalids, but of course she was.

From that time, David Carpenter came in to sit with her every day; and she began to look forward to his visits, and think beforehand about what she should talk to him, and go over their conversations together afterwards. And Nurse Morgan smiled to herself at the simple romance which was unfolding itself in the little world of this sick-room. Still a world that is large enough for a man and a woman and their love is, after all, the widest world we know of, for its boundaries lie beyond all time, and its horizon line is that of eternity.

"It is so good of you to come and see me every afternoon," said Ursula, "and waste all your holiday in this stuffy room."

David shook his head. Speech never came readily to his lips.

"Why didn't you write to me?" she asked presently, "so many people did."

"I—I didn't know how to."

"It was so interesting," continued the girl, "seeing the kind of letters which were sent to me. It was such an index of the writers' different

characters. Because they knew I had nearly died, and so they wrote what they felt would be suitable under the circumstances."

"I see."

"And so many of them seemed to think that I should be somehow unnatural, and I know what an effort it was to them to write at all."

"What sharp eyes you have," and David smiled.

"Don't think that I am criticising what any one was good enough to give me. I am grateful for every one. But you can't help thinking about things when you are lying ill, and it was like a peep into their inner selves."

"I wish I had written," said David, "only I did not know what to say."

Ursula laughed. "But you know what to say to me now, and writing should be just the same as talking."

"I generally feel such an ass when I try to say what I really feel."

"Not with me?" she pleaded.

"Well, perhaps not with you, because—because ——"

"Because what? I want to know."

"Because," he said slowly, "because I am

thinking so much about you, and what I can say to help and comfort you, that I forget about myself altogether."

Tears sprang up into the girl's eyes, but she smiled through them.

"Some people made frantic efforts to cheer me up," she continued, reverting to their former subject to relieve the tension, "and told me bits of news and actually wrote out funny tales and riddles; and some introduced little homilies on the necessity of resignation; and others forgot about me altogether after the first few lines and had much to tell of their own concerns and interests."

"Whose letters did you like the best?" David asked.

"My dear Mrs. Lyall's. She wrote exactly as she talks, and the fact that I was ill and might have died made no difference to her, or to me, in our true selves, or any of the truths about us. It was not strange country to her where I had been tarrying, but just the entrance to her home, you know."

"Don't talk about it," and there was a sharp pain in David's voice.

"Why should you mind? I have so much to learn from it all."

"But, dear, you have to learn now how to live, not how to die."

"I think they are the same thing," said Ursula simply.

"It was so wonderful being ill," she continued after a long restful silence. "I want to tell you. Things can never be the same to me again."

"How, dear?"

"When we walk to the top of a hill we see much wider views, you know, than at its foot. And it seems to be that big experiences are the hills of life, and the world is different when we have once looked away into its distances. I used to mind about things so dreadfully, but since I have been up there I know how small they really are."

"What did you mind about?" asked David pityingly.

"About being so delicate and not able to do things. And still more about being crowded out of other people's lives, as I have out of my father's, you know, and—and out of my old friend Merton Wainwright's."

David's brow darkened; but his clasp of Ursula's hand grew stronger and he drew a little closer.

"But I don't mind about those things now. I made a mistake in trying to carry my burdens

all by myself, and in thinking that I had to bear the responsibility of what God Himself had done. I knew, when I was ill, that being weak and helpless only brought help nearer, and so it was a good thing after all. And I found, too," Ursula went on with a strange, exalted look, "that what I used to think was love, is not really love at all. For love does not fail us when we cease to be able to earn it."

"Tell me, dear," and David's voice thrilled, "don't you mind about Merton now?"

"Not in the way you imagine. It was hard at first to feel he had gone out of my life for I was very fond of him. At one time I think we loved each other in a crude, elementary way, and for his sake I hated my lot and my poverty and my work, and perhaps my God, too. But that all seems so long ago, when I was the other Ursula," and she smiled slightly.

"Then you do not love him now?" breathlessly.

"No. The feeling we had for each other failed because it was of our own making, and therefore very poorly made. So thin and cheap that it could be bought and sold for the price of a new frock. Love, as God gives it, is not of such stuff as that, nor given so grudgingly."

"I was afraid you would fret so, dear."

"Merton used to care for me," she continued slowly, "but I know now that it was a funny kind of caring. A sort of examination certificate for passing in looks and manners and clothes. I have always been trying to pass that examination since I was quite little; but it was a competitive one, and a prettier, better dressed girl could easily gain higher marks. Love is no certificate of merit, but a free charter of happiness signed and sealed in heaven."

"I thought it would make you so unhappy during your illness, all alone, poor child! That you should be ill just then seemed the worst thing that could have happened to you."

"But it was really the best," and a glad confidence lighted her eyes. "It was God's way of healing the wound, and He does things so differently from us. Only," and here Ursula's lips quivered and her eyes overflowed with tears, "it is a bit hard to come back again to the old things. Is it wrong of me," and she looked up pleadingly, "to wish I had died, since nobody is left to want me much?"

"Oh, my darling!" and David's whisper was still a cry, "I am left, and I want you. Stay with me, Ursula, and love me a little if you can."

The girl started. Whither she had drifted she could hardly trace. It had all seemed part of the new, restful experience of illness, and she was too weak to think things out.

"I love you, and have always loved you," David's voice was saying. "I don't know when it began, I only know that it can never end. I cannot speak when I feel things most, but you know—you must know—what you really are to me!"

"I don't think I quite understand," and Ursula's face was very white. "You have been so good to me I could never be grateful enough—but this other thought is so new."

"And is it strange to you, my child? Strange that I should love you so? Good heavens! How blind you have been!"

"No, it is not strange," said Ursula softly, "it is new, and it is wonderful, but," and she leaned her tired head against his shoulder, "it is home all the same."

"And will you really belong to me?" murmured David, almost crushing her slender frame in his strong arms.

"Belong to you," repeated the girl, "how good it sounds!"

"You are so little and weak, dear heart, but

you shall never have another burden to carry that I can lift."

"Yes, I am weak. So weak and helpless and needy that I am not worth such a large measure of love."

"Listen, my darling. It is all these things that hold you so dear to me."

"But they are just the things that I have always been ashamed of and wanting so badly to cure."

"Then, thank God you failed."

"I never thought that I should thank Him for my failures," said Ursula, with a fleeting smile. "But if they have won me your love I see what friends they were."

"There was no question of winning my love," replied David thoughtfully, "for you have always had it and I could not help giving it you, dear. That was all."

"I went to a ball to try and find happiness," said Ursula after a while, "and it was wrapped up for me in a fever instead. How stupid we are when we want to manage our lives for ourselves! I never shall again."

"What a wise little girl you are!" and David smiled.

"I am not. I have only just seen what an ignorant little girl I am."

"But isn't that where wisdom begins, dear? And it seems to me that you have learned a great deal during these last few weeks."

"I ought to," said Ursula earnestly. "For to look death in the face is to meet with a great teacher."

David held her very close.

"How nearly I lost you!" he whispered.

"But you never would quite if you loved me like this," and Ursula shook her head.

"How do you mean?"

"Real love is never lost or wasted, and death cannot destroy it, only delays it for a while. You could not have told me of your love quite so soon—that was all."

"Little Ursula," began David with a strange thrill in his voice, "do you think you can ever love me at all, too? I did not mean to ask you so soon—but—but—I cannot help it, dear."

And Ursula in answer held up her sweet child-face, and the man, looking into the depths of her truthful eyes, was satisfied.

CHAPTER XIII

KERRIESORT LODGE

WHILE Ursula was learning her lessons in the mystic school of sickness and suffering, Merton Wainwright was learning his in the playground of Kerriesort Lodge. And there are almost as many lessons to be learnt in playgrounds as in schools. He had travelled up with the Mandeville party to their Lodge at the edge of a huge deer forest which extended over a vast portion of one of the large islands lying at the far northwest of the mainland. The saloon carriages, the special train from Iverness, the yacht which met them all appealed to Merton in a way which even he would have been ashamed to confess; but his love for Violet was distinctly affected and increased by the royal luxury of her entourage; and to feel that he was about to become a member of such a family gave his head the final turn towards which it had long been inclining.

Lord and Lady Middlesex, with their son and daughter, were the principal members of the house party, which otherwise consisted of Lilla

Langbridge and a miscellaneous assortment of men who were more or less good shots, and among whom Merton recognised Major Trayne and old Admiral Kingston; though the most important of them in the eyes of everybody seemed to be a certain Captain Evelix, who had been wounded in the war, decorated with the Victoria Cross, and now was convalescing under the most favourable conditions possible. A splendid-looking young man—standing six-feet-two in his socks, with golden-brown hair, a ruddy sunburnt face, and eyes so big and blue that they ought to have belonged to a professional beauty instead of being thrown away on a soldier. Not that many girls whom Ian Evelix knew considered them thrown away; but still he himself was perfectly indifferent to them, which the professional beauty would not have been; and he was quite handsome enough in the lithe grace of his figure and the proud poise of his head without wanting a pair of girl's eyes to make his attractions more manifold. He wore the kilt of the Evelix tartan, for his father was head of an ancient clan, and Castle Evelix was one of the oldest of the Highland homes still inhabited. Merton felt almost small and quite insignificant as he stood beside him.

"Won't you be able to shoot at all?" asked little Pat Mandeville, laying a small, dirty hand pityingly on the captain's sling, and with adoring admiration in his eyes.

"Not this year, I am afraid, old man," and Ian Evelix looked down on him much as a race horse would regard a stable kitten.

"Jolly rough on you!" piped the child. "I say, if you walk on the hill, will you let me come too?"

"Rather. You can do lots of things for me which my lame arm can't." So Pat's cup of bliss was full, and he hung about the wounded giant with a devotion and hero-worship which Victoria Crosses are apt to kindle in the hearts of small schoolboys, and many of their elders too.

The life in Scotland was a complete change to anything Merton had ever experienced, and one in which he felt a little strange. Everything in London seemed suddenly to have been forgotten, and even Mr. Mandeville himself talked as if the catching of fish, and the shooting of birds, and the slaying of beasts were the only really important things to be done in the world. The dignified statesman seemed to have laid aside his statesmanship with his frock coat, and to have

developed another self, clothed in a tweed jacket and knickerbockers. The girls were most enthusiastic in all kinds of sport, and even Lady Middlesex tied on a large mushroom hat, took a permanent place in the steam launch, and untiringly fished in the loch which ran up close to the garden gate of Kerriesort.

"What are you going to do to-day?" Violet asked Merton on one of the first mornings there. "You never came out to bathe. How lazy of you!"

"I did not know you were going to, or when?"

"Bathing parade is at eight, sharp," announced young Lord Pangbourne, "and no shirking allowed."

"I will come to-morrow," lisped Miss Langbridge, "if you boys will promise not to push me in off the landing stage."

"The promises they make in their clothes are laid aside therewith," remarked Victoria. "So you must not consider them binding."

"What will you do?" repeated Violet.

"Come with you," replied Merton.

"I am going on the hill with father and Captain Evelix."

"And me, too," chimed in Pat.

"I should love to walk with you," said Merton, with a sentimental glance.

"All right," replied his lady-love practically, "only wouldn't you rather go salmon fishing, or to the otter hunting? I believe there is a grouse-shooting party, too."

"Oh, no! As if I could ever want to do anything more than come with you!"

"I know you wouldn't in one way," agreed Violet, with a smile, "only of course sport doesn't count. A man always wants to kill things, and in Scotland, in August! Why he would be ill if he didn't."

"I wish you were going into the forest instead of on to the hill," said Merton, with visions of green glades.

Violet raised her eyebrows.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed. "There's no difference."

"It would be so lovely to sit with you in the shade on a hot day like this," he continued tenderly.

"But it is a deer forest," gasped Violet.

Merton looked puzzled. "Is it too far away?" he asked.

"It is here. We are on the edge of it."

"But where are the trees?"

"There aren't any," Violet was beginning helplessly to explain, when Victoria called her.

"Violet," whispered her sister, "what is Lilla going to do?"

"I think she and Admiral Kingston might go trout fishing. They won't catch anything because the admiral will never stop talking, and Lilla can't throw a fly, but it will keep them busy and happy all day."

"What a good idea! I don't think Admiral Kingston has ever told her about his trip to Egypt. I will start him on that before they go."

"But he won't get through it in one day, Vic. It takes about forty-eight hours with no intervals for rest or refreshment, if I remember rightly."

"Yes, I know. But he may take her out again to-morrow to finish, don't you see? Otherwise I am afraid he would not. People never want two days running with Lilla."

"Victoria, dear," exclaimed Miss Langbridge, "do tell me what to wear here? How do you generally dress?"

"Like shabby boys in the morning, and smart girls in the evening; it is quite easy and simple."

So the various parties went off to wage the untiring warfare which has always existed be-

tween man and beast, especially in the masculine English mind; and it was quite in the evening before they were gathered together again. Some from the hill, and some from the sea, some from the still, brown lochs that lie among the mountains, and others from the small islands where the otters are to be found. A healthy, hungry, sunburnt party, all full of the success or failure which had met with their efforts of destruction by land or water.

"Oh, Victoria!" exclaimed Violet, rushing into her sister's room when the maid had finished the arrangement of her golden hair and fastened her into a dazzling frock. "Such an awful thing has happened!"

Victoria was all ears immediately.

"You know Merton came on the hill with father and Captain Evelix and me and—do prepare for a shock, Vic—he wore cuffs! I thought I should have expired when I saw them."

"Cuffs!" exclaimed her sister. "What kind of cuffs?"

"The worst kind," groaned Violet, "the ones with a limp waist in the middle, which are reversible and wrap over with a solitaire! What shall I do?"

"But what possessed him, Vic?"

"The devil, I should think! He had a flannel shirt on, and he was afraid to face the flannel wristbands I suppose. It is all very well for you to laugh, Vic, but you are not engaged to him."

"I am not laughing," replied Victoria mendaciously. "I sympathise with you from the depths of my soul. But can't you tell him not to, Violet?"

"Oh! I can tell him. But think of the responsibility of being married to a man who knows no better than that. Of course in London he always wore a white shirt, so he was not exposed to temptation."

"But you are not married to him yet," suggested Victoria soothingly.

Violet breathed a sigh of relief, and cheered up materially. "Of course I am not, I had forgotten that. Isn't Captain Evelix good-looking?"

"Did you get a stag after all, Vi?"

"Yes. Father missed his first shot, and then Merton spoke and spoiled the next one. I was awfully vexed at the time about that, too. Even Pat knew better than to breathe. But we stalked this one till nearly five and it is a splendid beast."

"I am so glad. I do like father to enjoy himself, and this is his first day on the hill."

The party which assembled every night for dinner at Kerriesort looked as if a fairy had transformed it with her beauty-bestowing wand since it met in the morning at breakfast. The sheeny satins of the girls, the flashing jewels of the dowagers; Ian Evelix's picturesque tartan, and even little Pat resplendent in a spotless collar and tiny white waistcoat—all helped to fill the long, low drawing-room with a most effective crowd.

"What! a little bit of a chap like you sitting up to dinner!" exclaimed his father one evening, passing a caressing hand over the small, neatly-brushed, yellow head, "why aren't you with your sisters in the schoolroom, eh?"

"Pat is to dine downstairs as a great treat," explained Lady Clementina, "because he has fired his first shot to-day."

"And one good treat deserves another," suggested Victoria.

"He is quite a big schoolboy, isn't he, Pangbourne? Do you get them this size at Eton?"

"Rather not, Uncle Richard. I never saw such a microbe of a chap in my life; not even at my preparatory."

"I'm not all that little," exclaimed Pat indignantly, "not even the littlest at school. There's one fellow lots littler."

"I wonder you can see him with the naked eye, then," remarked his cousin.

"He's an awful little muff, too," continued the boy patronisingly, "wanted to know why the fellows were divided into Julias and Cæsars, and what made him a Julia?"

Mr. Mandeville and his nephew laughed.

"And said he thought the big boys at school were always called the thermometers."

"What did you say to him, my son?"

"I smacked his head," replied Pat simply.

"What a very nice face Captain Evelix has," remarked Lady Middlesex to her sister-in-law, as they sat over their work in the drawing-room after dinner. "I am sure he has an earnest disposition."

"He has a splendid figure," replied Lady Clementina, "but what a pity it is he has been wounded so early in the war, and so is losing the chief part of it."

"I think wounds often have a very sobering effect upon young men," continued Lady Middlesex. "I wonder whether he would join our guild? I must ask him. And that reminds me.

Clementina, I wish you would join that sweet guild of Mrs. Craven's for not speaking evil of any one."

"Oh, my dear! I couldn't. At least not as long as Charles remains in my service. He is so unspeakably aggravating."

"But I do not think servants count," replied Lady Middlesex. "They really are too trying!"

"Violet has gone out with Ian Evelix to see the moon," exclaimed Lady Clementina. "That looks as if they rather admired each other."

"But I thought she was engaged to Mr. Wainwright."

"So she is, Annabel. But that was settled before Ian came home."

"I always wonder you gave your consent."

"My dear, with three headstrong daughters out and two more growing up, you had always better give your consent. It would make no difference if you didn't, except increase their undesirable affections."

"My Madeline is so wonderfully obedient," murmured her mother.

"Your Madeline isn't in love yet!" and Lady Clementina nodded her head wisely.

"Do you think that Violet will break it off with young Wainwright?" asked Lady Middlesex.

"Seeing that her father and I have offered no opposition to the engagement, and moreover have invited him here for as long as she likes, I should not be surprised if she did."

"It would greatly upset me if Madeline jilted any one," and her mother sighed.

"Nonsense, my dear. If you had five daughters instead of one, you would be so thankful when they were all well and happy that you wouldn't bother your head about their playthings."

"Madeline is very thoughtful for her years," continued Lady Middlesex. "She was quite my right hand at my policeman's tea the week before we left town."

Lady Clementina nodded absently, but her eyes were roving through the unshuttered window—not to the matchless beauty of the silver loch lying between the bare, black hills, all touched with the mystic silence of moonlight; but the two young people wandering along the mountain path, where the frosted sheen of Violet's white satin dress showed clear and distinct against the tall, dark figure beside her.

"Ian is the only son of Lord Evelix," Lady Clementina murmured with apparent irreverence.

"Those semi-social, semi-religious gatherings

have a wonderful influence for good," her sister-in-law was saying, "and Madeline looked so sweet and maidenly handing bread-and-butter. I spoke a few words to them myself afterwards."

"I can't imagine how you can think of anything to say, Annabel. I never should be able to. Besides, I know I should laugh and spoil everything even if I could."

"Dear policemen have such dangerous lives all among dreadful criminals and people of that kind; and then being out all night on duty must be so chilly and tiring. I told them that if at any time they should be dying and would send me a postcard I would come to them at once."

"How good and unselfish of you, my dear Annabel!"

"I feel it my duty," and Lady Middlesex glanced affectionately at the woolen gloves she was knitting for those policemen who should not happen to be dying.

"We have had a roughish day on the hill," said Major Trayne as some of the party drifted in from the billiard room. "Quite a sharp squall about one o'clock and a heavy thunder-shower. It was pretty cold, too."

"If we must have thunder and lightning, I prefer it served hot," remarked Victoria, "like soup

and sausages. There seems no sense in having it cold as we did to-day."

"Did you go to see the salmon-netting after all?" he asked her.

"Yes. We got sixty-five. Pangbourne went with us, and Sir Simon Fortescue."

"Sir Simon is a swell doctor, isn't he?"

"Warranted to cure royal ailments," explained Victoria. "He told me that children ought to sleep with their heads lower than their feet to increase their brain power. I am so thankful mother did not adopt that plan with us, because what would have happened to me if my brain power had been increased? I tremble to think of it."

"It would have been serious—very serious," he replied gravely.

"If not fatal! To my friends, I mean."

"Admiral Kingston tells a great many very prosy stories," continued Major Trayne.

"Anecdotalism is his besetting sin," and Victoria shook her head.

"Some one ought to cure him of it. I think, don't you, Miss Mandeville, that people ought to be told of their faults?"

"Yes, I do. And I have invented a new profession in connection with it. There would be a

kind of moral inspector appointed to each district and he would have to tell you of a fault when nine people outside your own family had noticed it."

"He would not be a popular individual."

"The appointment would be one of five years' duration like a governorship. Because, you see, he would not have a friend left by the end of that time."

"I don't think there would be much competition for it."

"My dear Major Trayne—younger sons can't be choosers. And lots of people don't mind becoming popular even without a large salary."

"Here comes your sister and young Evelix. By the way, Merton Wainwright doesn't look as if he were enjoying himself much to-night."

"I think it would be heavenly to wear a kilt," Violet was saying.

"More airy than heavenly I should say, my dear young lady," exclaimed Admiral Kingston with a burst of delighted laughter at his own wit. "Ha! Ha!"

"Come and talk to me, Violet," whispered Merton. "I have not seen you for a moment all day."

"Did you get many fish?" she asked as she sat down beside him on the window-seat.

"Oh, bother the fish! Don't let us talk about them."

Violet sighed. Think of a man spending the whole day on Loch Kerriesort and not wanting to talk about the fish!

"I wish you would kill something," she said plaintively. "I don't much mind what—only you see, Merton, you have been here a whole fortnight and not killed a single thing."

"I am afraid I don't know how to," he replied gloomily. "I never learned to shoot, I can't throw a fly, so what is a fellow to do?"

"You might take a little line and go with Aunt Annabel. That would be better than nothing." But her voice was a little depressed.

"All right. Only, I say, Violet, do be kind to me now."

"I am always kind to you," she protested hastily, because she felt that really she was not. "How can you say such stupid things?"

"Then, talk to me, dear."

"It is that you won't talk," argued his lady-love, a trifle impatiently for her. "You never join in with the other men, and to-night at dinner you hardly spoke."

"I haven't much to say about sport," he re-

plied shortly. "And they never mention anything else here."

"Oh, yes, they do! They talked about the war and Captain Evelix told us those splendid stories. I wish he would tell us more about himself and his adventures, don't you?"

"No, I can't say that I do."

"Don't you like Captain Evelix, then, Merton? Why, everybody does. He's got the Victoria Cross, you know. And being wounded makes him so awfully interesting."

"A cheap enough way of winning interest," grumbled Merton, "to get a bullet in your arm. He said it was only a scratch."

"Only a scratch!" and Violet's face flushed. "Do you suppose they invalid men home for scratches? Why, they were afraid he would lose his arm altogether. And to have to keep it in a sling all during the shooting time is simply too hard on any man."

"Not if it makes you sorry for him," and Merton's face was pale with jealousy.

"I don't thing you are a bit nice this evening," and Violet rose from her seat. "You are so cross and horrid."

"I'm not. Oh, don't go, Violet!" pleaded Merton. "I never see anything of you now."

"Don't be ridiculous. And besides, Merton, you must talk to the others, too. It is awful to sit silent through a whole meal."

"If I can't talk to you I won't to any one," and he spoke impatiently.

"But they will think you so dull," said Violet, who would as soon have been thought dishonest as dull.

"I don't care what anybody thinks of me—except you."

Violet sighed. Merton was really becoming rather difficult to manage. He had always been so sure of himself before, and the confidence had kept him pleasant. But now he was conscious of a sense of failing in this new world of sport, and because it seemed to him to matter so little, and to be such a very unimportant world in itself, the feeling of failure chafed him infinitely more, and made him cross and cantankerous.

"I do wish you would be nice and sensible," she remarked sadly. "It would make everything so much easier."

"It doesn't matter what a fellow can do in the way of scholarship or work," he grumbled on—"if he can't shoot well you girls think nothing of him."

"Oh, Merton! How can you be so unjust.

I think a lot of—of—of father, you know, and he misses his shot quite as often as not."

"And I don't believe you really care for me one bit," continued the young man in an aggrieved voice. But he did believe it all the same, and only wanted the reiteration of it from Violet's sweet lips, just as a spoilt child cries for the sugar it knows a cry will make sure of. Perhaps Violet was a little shaken in that belief of late, and so she answered very gently,

"Don't let us quarrel, Merton. And you will see a great deal of me to-morrow." She added with a smile, "For we are to spend the whole day on Sir Charles Fairbairn's yacht, and go for a trip to the North Pole or somewhere equally delightful. He is anchoring for a few days in Loch Kerriesort, you know."

So Merton was smoothed over, and started in high spirits on the following morning with the rest of the party who were going yachting. A fresh northwest wind ruffled the sea and flecked it with foaming waves far out to the deep indigo horizon line; and as long as they skirted the coast, with its wonderful panorama of brown hills and blue mountains and grey rocks, the boat behaved herself very nicely, and went dancing through the clear, green water as a buoyant

bird on its homeward way. But by and by, as they turned her head out seawards, she began to leap over the larger waves that rose against her, and some of those on board, of which Merton was one, wished themselves on dry land again. For some time he and Violet had sat together a little apart from the others, and she had been so sweet and nice that all his recent vexations were forgotten; he had listened to her merry prattle just as he used to do in London, and felt the proud, glad sense of possession as he admired every detail of her blue serge costume, so perfectly suited to the occasion, and watched with love-filled eyes the soft little rings of gold which the wind fetched from under her sailor hat, and the tiny freckles which the sun dared to imprint across the bridge of her small nose.

"I say you look jolly green!" exclaimed Pat, delightedly, whose restless eyes and legs and tongue were never still for a moment. "Beginning to feel bad, I guess?" And the child's patronising superiority was colossal.

Merton felt a sudden hatred for all small boys and for Pat Mandeville in particular. Even the beauty seemed fading from Violet's sunny face, and the sky above, and sea below were robbed of their sapphire glory. He decided that he

hated yachting and wished himself back in the solid grey pile of buildings at Whitehall. Nobody appreciated his talents in this ridiculous world of sea and mountain and moor, and Merton could hardly bear not to be appreciated.

"Lunch is ready," continued Pat with a wicked little grin. "I'm jolly hungry. Aren't you two?"

"Of course," replied Violet quickly. It vexed her that Merton should be such a poor sailor, and she felt an unholy desire to make him suffer for it; a most unnecessary piece of discipline on her part, seeing that the excursion was providing him with quite enough suffering of itself.

She sat next Ian Evelix in the saloon, and delighted in the immensity of his appetite, while poor Merton played with dry toast and soda and water and wished he were dead.

"I had a wire from General Woodbridge just before we started," said Lady Clementina, "to say he is coming to stay. Isn't it dear of him, seeing that I never asked him?"

"Oh, yes! mother," interrupted Victoria, "you forget. You must have invited him to stay with us next summer."

"But next summer is never supposed to come, you know, my dear. I have one such laid up

for me somewhere crammed full of plans and visitors and duties."

"It is so easy to promise you will go and see people in summer," said Violet.

"And make them guild clothes for the same date," continued Victoria. "I belong to several of that kind."

"Speaking of guilds," observed Lady Middlesex with a sudden burst of interest, "reminds me that I promised to collect something for soldiers, but I have forgotten exactly what."

"Perhaps Evelix can make a suggestion," said Admiral Kingston.

"My experience of soldiers would suggest plenty of requirements," replied the hero looking up from a salad which he and Violet were concocting together.

"But now I come to think of it," continued her ladyship, "I believe it was sailors not soldiers, and I feel sure it is something knitted. Nightcaps, perhaps."

"General Woodbridge took me down to dinner one night this season," Victoria told them. "He never spoke during the soup and then he asked me if I had a husband."

"What did you say, Vic?" asked her mother.

"I was very kind and explanatory and said

that I had not, but I was the daughter of Mr. Mandeville and then I quoted the Court Guide to father so that he might fully understand my parentage. During the second *entrée* he asked me if my husband was in the House of Commons."

"And what did you tell him that time?" Ian Evelix asked.

"I was still perseveringly patient, like Balaam's ass, and repeated that I had not a husband, but that my father was in the House of Commons. Then he asked me if my father was alive."

"What a delightful man he must be!" exclaimed Sir Charles whose anxieties over the luncheon were somewhat abating within his bachelor soul.

"I explained that father was sufficiently alive as I had already told him, to be in Parliament, though of course that does not presuppose an inordinate stock of vitality. And he thought that well over during two courses."

"And then?" queried the admiral.

"Then he asked me if my husband was there that night, and I said, not that I knew of; but one could never tell what might come out of such parties."

"I am so glad he is coming," exclaimed Lady Clementina joining in the general laugh. "It will be such fun!"

"I suppose the sailors would not mind if I used up some old wool I have by me for the nightcaps?" Lady Middlesex asked the admiral. "The only thing against it is that it is pink, and sailors are supposed to prefer navy blue, aren't they? But the colour would hardly matter by lamplight?"

"It ought to match their dressing-gowns, Aunt Annabel," suggested Victoria solemnly. But just then the captain of the yacht appeared at the door of the saloon with a mysterious message for Sir Charles, and after much whispering and rushing about, the passengers were informed that the engines had broken down and there was no chance of returning by the yacht that night. Neither was it safe to anchor her in so rough a sea on that rocky coast, and the boat was too small to convey the party to land, even if they were quite sure that land was near enough to row to.

"Oh, Merton!" exclaimed Violet rushing up on to the bridge, "we are shipwrecked. Isn't it an adventure?"

"Shipwrecked!" he echoed in a voice of dis-

tress, having been counting the hours before full steam could bring them back to land. "What do you mean?"

"The engines have collapsed, and we can't lie to, so we must signal for help."

"But there isn't a boat in sight," and they scanned the wide, unbroken stretch of horizon line.

A babel of voices rose from the saloon as the party came on deck.

"How frightful!" cried Lady Clementina. "I am terrified. But isn't it fun, girls? I do hope we shan't have to swim for our lives. Salt water makes one so dreadfully sticky."

"I feel like Robinson Crusoe, or the Ancient Mariner, or somebody equally classic," said Victoria. "I do hope there is a desert island handy. I don't expect I shall be quite at my best on a desert island, though anything is better than in the sea on an afternoon like this."

"Desert islands are often wonderfully productive," added Lady Middlesex. "I remember reading somewhere of one on which all the necessaries of life both as regards food and clothing were to be found."

"Well, let us hope we shall be cast on it, Aunt Annabel," and Victoria's eyes twinkled.

"They were foreigners, I believe, who found it," continued Lady Middlesex, "with rather an ordinary name such as Tomkinson. But I forget the exact details."

"Weren't they a Swiss family called Robinson?" suggested her niece demurely.

"I dare say so, dear. Robinson! Yes, I think that was the name. I had the impression that they were nobody particular."

Just then Admiral Kingston and Ian Evelix came up from the engine room.

"It is no use," was the tale they had to tell. "Blow the fog horn and then whistle and wave a flag of distress, for there is a sail in sight."

Merton's face was white as marble. He was feeling quite unhappy enough before when he had Kerriesort Lodge in a few hours to look forward to. But now the horror of this new catastrophe took all the starch out of his limbs, made him register a mighty vow that he would never enter a boat again.

"What is the matter?" Violet asked him, with a little frown between her eyebrows.

"Matter enough, I should think!" he exclaimed ungraciously, for he was feeling too ill and unhappy to be either heroic or polite.

"I am glad I am one of the women and chil-

dren," and Violet laughed. "I should hate to be a man and have to swim in that nasty cold water."

"I can't swim," said Merton gloomily.

"Not swim!" and her voice indicated surprised displeasure. "Then you can't rescue me. How stupid and tiresome of you! And I believe you are afraid, too," she added spitefully. "You look livid."

"I do hope," sighed Lady Middlesex, "that if we should be detained from home as castaways, or anything of that kind, that Madeline will remember that all the money in the small division of my cash-box is what I have collected for charitable purposes and not my own. It would be so distressing to me if she spent it on gloves."

"It would be a fine haul for Madeline," laughed Victoria.

"Oh, but, my dear! You forget how specially wicked it would be. Something of the same kind as that of which poor Ananias and Sapphira were such sad examples."

"But Madeline's would not be at all a similar case, Aunt Annabel."

"Perhaps not. Still one cannot be too careful."

"Violet," sighed Merton, to whom in his pres-

ent state of seasickness the thought of death seemed but a pleasant deliverance, "it is a nice thing to think we shall go down together."

"No, it isn't!" she cried vehemently. "It is perfectly horrid; and I wish you wouldn't have such creepy ideas. I shall ask Captain Evelix if there is any danger," she added as a parting threat.

"You are not afraid?" said Ian gently, as Violet laid a pleading hand on his tied-up sleeve.

"No, of course not. But there is no real danger, is there?" and her blue eyes were faintly clouded with anxiety.

"Not the slightest bit in the world," he assured her. "Who has been trying to frighten?"

"Nobody. Only Mr. Wainwright seemed to think we might all be drowned."

Ian's lips curled with scorn, but all he said, was:

"What rot!"

"I suppose you can swim?" Violet asked him.

"That is almost as funny a question to ask an Evelix, as to ask a fish!" he exclaimed with a smile. "Don't you know that Castle Evelix is built on a rock sheer out of the sea, so that as a youngster I was as much in the water as on land?"

"But would not your bad arm prevent you now?"

"Rather not. I could keep myself afloat—and you," and his eyes were full of a dangerous tenderness, "if there were any necessity. But there won't be," he added emphatically, which settled the matter once for all in Violet's mind, as she was one of those women, who implicitly trust masculine assurance however great her feminine fear.

"Look what I have thought of!" cried Lady Clementina, waving a saucepan in the air. "It will be absolutely priceless in the desert island. Oh, I do call this fun!" rushing round exhibiting her treasure with delight.

All this time the captain of the yacht, assisted by Sir Charles, Admiral Kingston and Pat were signalling wildly to attract the attention of a fishing smack which was on its homeward way after two months' fishing in the northern seas.

"She's altering her course," exclaimed the admiral, as the big brown sail was shifted. "It is your whistling that's done it," he added to Pat, who was almost black in the face with his protracted efforts.

"I can whistle through my fingers rather de-

cently," replied the small boy proudly, "and the sound carries a jolly long way."

"If we are going to be picked up by that boat," Victoria remarked, "I shall put on my ulster, for there seems to be almost as many waves over as under it."

"I can never jump on to it," shrieked Lady Clementina, "it bounces so. What a frightful adventure this is!"

"Please be very careful not to let my mother slip into the sea," Victoria begged Sir Charles. "We are rather fussy about her, and it is most important that she should be kept dry."

"My dear, that sounds as if I never washed," Lady Clementina chimed in.

"Oh no! It is only salt water that you can't stand. I don't know what can stand salt water except blue serge, and that only does so in the advertisements."

When it came to the transit from the yacht to the smack there was really a small opportunity for bravery; the sea was playing pitch and toss with the smaller craft much more vigorously than with the yacht, and there was a yawning gulf of deep, green water continually appearing between the two.

Lady Clementina squealed and flung her arms

round Admiral Kingston's neck before she was safely over, but the girls held on to Ian Evelix's hand and felt they could have run any risk safely with such support. Merton, sick and giddy enough before, shrank from the leap, and called forth even Pat's juvenile contempt by his helpless hesitation.

"Come on," exclaimed the young soldier, who stood as firmly on the rocking boat as if it were a drawing-room floor. "Here, I have hold of you," and with his strong arm he swung Merton across.

Violet glanced at them both; and her pitiless, girlish judgment made no allowances for the wretched combination of seasickness and jealousy from which poor Merton was suffering. She only thought what a miserable contrast he looked to the hero of the Victoria Cross, and, for not quite the first time since he had been with them at Kerriesort, she felt a little ashamed of him.

It was a very rough craft which had come to their rescue, with five fishermen who could only understand Gaelic, in which it was fortunate that Ian Evelix could talk to them. They were going home to land that night and were quite willing to take the yacht party with them.

"It was most providential their being in sight," exclaimed Lady Clementina thankfully.

"I should call it a special providence," said her sister-in-law; as if a special providence were something as exclusive and expensive as a special train.

"This is quite an adventure!" and the admiral chuckled with innate cheeriness. "I never was in such a wreck before though I have been in the navy for nearly fifty years. And you, my dear ladies, are all so plucky I am quite proud of you. Ha! Ha!"

"I am afraid," began Lady Middlesex, "that fishermen are somewhat neglected religiously as a class. Would you mind, Captain Evelix, just asking them to what parish they belong and whether there are any district visitors to look after them?"

"In the North Sea do you mean?" asked Victoria innocently.

"But I thought you had something to do yourself with deep sea fishermen?" said Lady Clementina. "I remember your telling me about them."

Lady Middlesex looked puzzled.

"Now I come to think of it," she said slowly, "I believe Madeline crochets for them. And I did something too, but I forgot exactly what."

"Well, that shows they are well looked after,

my dear aunt." And Victoria helped to wrap a disused sail round Lady Middlesex's shoulders; for the waves broke over the deck on which they all sat, with their feet dangling down into the hold.

"I remember the missioner's staying with us sometime last year," continued Lady Middlesex, utterly oblivious of the continuous showers of spray. "He was such an earnest man—a widower with ten children."

"Enough to make him earnest," interpolated Victoria.

"He has married again now, most suitably, to the secretary of the Young Women's Recreative Association, I believe. He has always been most dutiful in providing a home for his aged parents."

"And will the late secretary keep them on?" her niece asked with interest.

"The mother, I think, has passed away since the marriage."

"If I had been the bride," said Victoria, "I should rather have kept the mother and let the father pass away."

"But she would hardly be consulted, my dear. One is so powerless in a case of paralysis to carry out any preconceived designs."

"I am extremely sorry this has happened," said the unhappy host.

"But don't be, Sir Charles. It is such a thrilling experience, and we are all enjoying it so much," kindly replied Victoria who was detesting it with all her might. "Only," as she explained to Major Trayne afterwards, "how could she be truthful with Sir Charles' sad face bending over her?"

"It is very good of you to say so," murmured her host gratefully, which was precisely what it was not. Indeed it was distinctly wicked, as Victoria freely confessed, but she was sorry for him to be so very wretched.

"And some of them did enjoy it, you know," she added as an excuse, "Pat did immensely, and the admiral, as well as Violet and Ian Evelix."

For those two young people sat close together and talked in whispers and made delightful, silly little jokes, just as the Mandeville girls were wont to do with every man to whom they subsequently became engaged; and Merton clung to a rope at the other end of the boat and harbored thoughts of murder.

"Sir Simon Fortescue was telling me yesterday," remarked Victoria as she glanced at his

lowering brow, "that people can actually die of temper, and that makes me wonder," she added in a low voice to the admiral, "why Aunt Annabel has not lost some of her nearest and dearest."

"Ha! Ha! my dear young lady, very neat that. But begad! the noble earl was in a deuce of a passion with young Wainwright out on the hill."

"What had he done?"

"Caught his foot over some stones and came down with a fine crash and of course the stag Lord Middlesex had been stalking for hours was off like the wind."

"I can't bear people who catch their feet in things," observed Victoria thoughtfully. "But I am going to talk to Merton now if you will help me to creep under the sail. I feel it my duty as a district visitor."

But Merton was past appreciating Victoria's kind efforts, and answered her rippling talk with ungracious monosyllables; though all of this she readily forgave, knowing how extremely unhappy he really was, and expecting he would be still more so before very long.

The fishing smack landed them safely after many tacks, concerning the necessity of which

every one on board had a separate opinion, though the fishermen did their own way unmoved by even an admiral's advice, and consequently made the harbour in time for the party to catch the public steamer which conveyed them to their island home. And though dinner was not served till after midnight Violet was obliged to have a talk with Victoria before she went to bed.

"It's no use, Vic," she exclaimed vehemently, "I can never do it."

"What, dear?"

"Why, marry Merton, of course. What shall I do?"

"Break it off," suggested Victoria, trying to banish the "I-told-you-so" expression from her far-seeing eyes.

"You must tell me how to do it," said her younger sister, sadly. "You have had so much more practice than I."

"I should write," and Victoria looked thoughtful.

"But I can't write to a man who is staying in the house."

"He won't be staying in the house much longer, Vi dear. You know he is obliged to go back to his work almost at once."

"I can't bear to behave badly," sighed Violet. "I never have before."

"Oh! I have lots of times," said Victoria cheerfully, "and you don't really mind when you once get used to it. Besides it would be behaving much worse to marry him feeling as you do."

"Are you sure? What a comforting way of putting things you have!"

"That thought has often comforted me," Victoria confessed with a little laugh.

"It is peculiarly soothing! And you really think it is my duty to break it off?"

"I do indeed. Your solemn duty."

"How nice of you to say so, Vic. It has made me feel so much better already. And I don't think we are suited to each other, do you?"

"Oh, not at all!"

"And I should not make him happy, should I?"

"Quite the reverse."

"It is such a relief to me to hear you say so. And you think it would be positively wrong to go on with the engagement now, don't you, Vic?"

"I do indeed, under the circumstances."

"Then that is all right," and Violet shook back her wealth of golden hair from a distinctly happier face.

"He can marry that little dowdy Grey girl now," suggested her sister.

"Oh, no! Vic. He could not possibly like her as much as he does me."

"But I thought you did not want him to like you any more?" And Victoria's eyes twinkled though her lips were very grave.

"I don't want to like him," Violet explained quickly, "but it would be too horrid if he ceased to like me. He must never marry. I should be furious if he did."

"Of course you would. I was only joking."

"Victoria," said her younger sister slowly after a long pause, "how soon do you think it would be proper to be engaged to somebody else?"

"For my part I always prefer to be on with the new love before I am off with the old."

A little smile ran round Violet's lips and lurked in her eyes.

"Oh! I think there should be an interval," she said demurely. "Not a very long one, perhaps, but quite an interval."

"I dare say you are right, Vic. It does seem less heartless."

"But I am not a bit heartless, am I? It is really because I have so much heart that I shrink even from continuing a loveless engagement."

"Exactly. But don't you think it is time now we went to sleep? We can compose the letter after he has gone."

"Oh, Vic! What a dear you are! I was feeling quite unhappy about it all till you showed me so splendidly that it is only my duty. And I am sure it will be much better for Merton himself in the long run."

"As well as for you, dear. Good-night."

CHAPTER XIV

"THE MEASURE YE METE"

"WITH what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again," is a truth concerning our dealings with our fellow-men in this world, whatever deeper reference it may have to that which is to come. What we are to other people they will usually be to us, and if we give them of our good things we shall not in our turn be sent empty away. It is not always, however, that a precisely similar measuring glass is used in which to restore to us our deserts; as it was in the case of Merton Wainwright, for the postman brought him just such another letter as that which he had written to Ursula directly after the ball. A cleverer letter no doubt, for Merton with all his distinctions was no match intellectually for Victoria Mandeville, and she it was who had composed for Violet what would be best to say. A less brutally selfish letter on the surface though quite as deeply if more subtly so underneath; and touched with light-hearted carelessness which Merton once found so fascinating in

the way the Mandeville girls looked at things. But that sheet of writing paper sent for a penny to spoil a life, said in different words exactly the same thing which Merton himself had written to Ursula when he told her that her place in his life was wanted for somebody else. He did not acknowledge this to himself, indeed if he had given the comparison a thought, he would have felt how infinitely worse it was for Violet to throw him over than for him to throw over Ursula. A bitter anger filled his heart at first against every member of the Mandeville set, and most especially against Ian Evelix, whom he felt, was the rival who had wrought all the mischief. And his instinct in this matter was perfectly correct. If Captain Evelix, fresh from the war, with all its glories pinned on to his coat in the guise of a small iron cross, had not come home again just then with his arm in a sling most likely Violet Mandeville might have been true to Merton for several weeks or even months longer; though the fact of his failure at Kerriesort to be exactly like all the other men in dress and skill and speech had taken no small share in the undermining of his hold on her susceptible, conventional little heart.

"Curse the fellow, and his beastly blue eyes!"

he muttered furiously, as he paced up and down the room, his breakfast lying untasted on the table. "And curse the whole pack of women as a set of fools, who care nothing for a fellow's brains compared to his brute force. I suppose if I had been four inches taller, and as good a shot as I am a scholar I might have competed with the noble Evelix!" he added in a rush of bitterness.

The fire of Merton's wrath burned brightly for several days and a gradually diminishing portion of several nights also. But, as all fires have a knack of doing, it at last burnt itself out, and left a cheerless little heap of ashes in its place. As he stood ruefully regarding the dull, grey cinders instead of the garden of his romance which had flowered so gaily only a few weeks before, a great sadness and self-pity swept over Merton's soul. Anger keeps a man from feeling lonely, but when that had died down Merton realised how his life was suddenly emptied of all that had made it full and rich and interesting, and he felt utterly alone as he sorrowfully contemplated this new and painful experience. Clubs and theatres and parties he solemnly eschewed, and made up his mind that he had done with them forever, for how could

he again have the heart to laugh and talk as other men? Instead, he mournfully smoked his pipe in the seclusion of his own room, and indulged in a gentle melancholy which sometimes sent him to sleep and always soothed him. How cruelly he had been treated, and how sorry Violet would be when she realised what she had been foolish enough to throw away! It was rather a puzzle to him how Violet could be brought to a state of repentance, but he at last decided that it should be by means of his own early death. "Cut off in the very prime of manhood," he murmured to himself with satisfaction. The papers would have little paragraphs, and Violet would read them and be sorry. He was undecided as to the nature of the fatal illness when a still happier thought struck him: it should not be an illness at all—illnesses were dull and tiresome and involved so much that was unromantic and not picturesque—no, it should be an accident. An accident at Hyde Park Corner, when the Mandevilles' carriage was just coming out, and Violet should see him, with his white, set face upturned in the centre of the gathering crowd, and springing out of the carriage rush to his side. He could not quite make up his mind whether there should be a gleam of returning

consciousness, which he could utilise by giving her one reproachful look, but she would fall sobbing beside him and press her lips to his cold, dead face, and beg for forgiveness which it was too late to grant. Oh! it would be very thrilling and touching, and newspapers would tell the romantic story, and all society would read it. He lit another pipe with a really pleasurable sensation. Perhaps the shock would turn Violet's lovely golden hair grey in one night—but he did not care to imagine what would happen after the funeral. It would be too dull a world then for anything to matter much, he felt sure. But the funeral itself he thoroughly enjoyed, and settled on most of the wreaths and floral tributes, which he decided should be a blaze of colour instead of the usual white and mauve, just to indicate in a subtle way, which he could not quite define, that the career which had thus been destroyed by so unexpected a death was brilliant and bright and blazing with promise. Crimson azaleas, he felt, would artistically portray this idea, but there would also be a little, clumsily-wired spray, the work of Violet's own hands and wet with her tears among all the florists' costly flowers. He tried to picture Violet making that spray, her sweet eyes drowned with sorrow and her bright

face white with pain and remorse, but he could not do it. He could only remember her smiling in the sunshine, with a mischievous glint of fun in her merry blue eyes, and the sound of her trill-like laughter filled his ears. And then, down tumbled the ridiculous cardhouse he had been building so elaborately, and the memory of that sunny little cluster of curls at the back of her neck moved him with a sudden longing for her again so deep and strong that a big sob choked in his throat, and he laid his head on his arms, bowed down with the misery of loss and despair.

As there is a dignity born of all suffering, so Merton was more of a man when he went back into his former life and habits. He turned to his work with a renewed determination to find in that the interest which he used to believe was enough to fill a man's life. He dug up his old enthusiasms, and resolved that he would still succeed; that work would be his pleasure as well as his duty, and his engagement to Violet but a holiday idyll, crowded out of his thoughts and feelings by the superior force and strength of this work. But woman has a way of leaving very empty a place where she has once passed by; and Merton found that the old dreams of

happiness in his profession were dull and grey, and his young ambitions to succeed only for the sake of success grown limp and weak, now there was no woman to work for in his life. For since Merton had known Violet he had thought more about the Lady Wainwright than the Sir Merton, K.C.B., of which he had once boyishly boasted to his mother.

It was in his new, strange desolation of spirit that Merton's thoughts went back to Ursula. Now that he was so sore he remembered her soothing ways;—now nobody cared for him in London he saw again her outstretched hands and the glad light of welcome in her eyes; now that he inwardly fumed at the knowledge of Ian Evelix's superiority to himself in several, though really unimportant, ways, he felt a touch of comfort in Ursula's old, unbounded admiration and loyalty. He would go back to Ursula. The resolve blazed across the pages of a book he was trying to read, and once started it grew with amazing rapidity. How sweet would be her delight at his return, and the raw place in his heart would be quite safe from any careless touch, for did not Ursula always understand, and was not her good taste the outcome of sensitive sympathy rather than just a question of manners and tact?

He need never feel afraid of her sharp eyes and tongue as he had always been a little of Violet's, even during their happiest days—for Ursula had always looked up to him. And as he sat thinking over her glad greetings, for he would lose no time in going down to see her, he decided that he should perhaps be really happier with her after all, for a man has enough fencing and fighting to do in the world outside not to want his home to be an unfailing haven of rest. And Violet would not have been at all a rest. The life she loved was a strain to those not born to it, and Merton felt utterly tired now at the thought of always being on his best behaviour and in his dress clothes. A man ought to be the leading spirit in his own home, and looked up to and admired in a way in which he knew Violet never would have done. But with Ursula it would be different. She would understand that he could do no wrong. So Merton's brain galloped on, and it never once struck him that possibly Ursula had not been sitting still and waiting for him all this time.

He had heard from his mother that a portion of the Winstow world had taken itself for an autumn holiday to a village on the east coast. And he remembered now, from her

allusion to the girl's growing strong again there, that Ursula had been ill when he was at Kerriesort.

He was glad that she was not ill now, just when he wanted her. His own people were at Upperstrand, and the Coxes were to join them almost immediately. Also the Greys and David Carpenter. He referred to Mrs. Wainwright's letter again, having been too much occupied to read it carefully at the time; and the warm motherliness of the tone, which assured him that all his troubles were hers, without going into any galling particulars concerning Violet's treatment of him in breaking off the engagement, soothed his sore spirit, and he felt it would be very good to see his mother again. So with some alacrity he plunged into a Great Eastern time-table, and made his plans for spending the next week end at Upperstrand.

The news of Merton's broken engagement, however, filled his people at home with much indignation, though his mother was too wise to mention this in writing to him. Gertrude and Gladys, who had hoped for much fun from the connection, were specially irate, and Mr. Wainwright gave expression to some emphatic remarks concerning the behaviour of fine ladies

in general and Violet Mandeville in particular, which his son-in-law loudly applauded.

Indeed it brought it home to Albert Cox in a peculiarly pleasing manner how wise he had been to select a wife from a less exalted social station than Merton had so foolishly aspired to.

"But when the boy comes," said Mrs. Wainwright looking up from the telegram which announced his advent, "don't speak a word to him about it. If he wants to talk he can, but it is not for us to begin it. Don't forget what I say, Gladys."

"Gertrude said she should tell him what she thought of this Miss Violet Mandeville in double quick time," said her daughter testily, "and I think she's the right of it."

"Gertrude is not coming till next week, and Merton will have gone back by then, which I can't help feeling is all for the best; for Gertrude is a bit too out-spoken with the men to my thinking."

"Is he surprised about Ursula's engagement to David?" asked Gladys.

"I did not tell him, my dear. Other folks' good news is a bit trying when our own is bad, and it's better not to talk too much about it."

"What Ursula sees in that dull, old fogey,

I can't imagine. Give me a young one for choice," and Gladys smiled with satisfaction at the thought of Bernard Holt's small aggregate of years.

"Oh, well, my dear! it is fortunate we don't all see alike, and I am sure David will be kindness itself to the poor child. So thin and pale as she was after that nasty fever."

"He has to go away for this next Sunday, mother, to see about something down at that school in Devonshire of which he has been appointed the headmaster."

"And a sweet home he'll make of it for Ursula. He and Merton will be sorry to miss each other, though. However, perhaps when you're staying altogether in lodgings at the seaside it is better to have as few men about as possible. Papa and Mr. Grey are a bit of a handful when they take to politics, without any of the younger ones chiming in."

"How do you think Georgina and Mr. Grey get on with each other, mother?"

"Well, my dear, it is my opinion she is a bit too strict." Here the good lady shook her head. "And strictness doesn't do for men. When they get married it is a home they want and not a dame-school, and it is a woman's place to make

a home in what is only a house without her. But Georgina isn't that sort."

"Do you think Mr. Grey is fond of her?" Gladys asked.

"No, my love, I do not. Neither, I think, does Georgina, but she will never scold him into it, which is what a woman often tries to do when she can't make her husband love her for herself; though scolding never pays, you mark my words."

"He seems to cling much more to Ursula than he used. Haven't you noticed it, mother?"

"Yes, and that is often the way. Folks want a thing just because they have lost the chance of getting it. Since Ursula belonged to David here is one, and there is another who suddenly have discovered that they want her, too! Ah, my dear, it is the same old story! The buns in the shop windows look twice as tasty as those on the tea-table at home, especially to a man."

"That is why papa always finds fault with our cooking compared to other people's, I suppose?"

"Well, my love, and what if he does? It is but natural, and I understand all about it. It is a great mistake for a wife to feel hurt when her husband complains that her cooking isn't like

what his mother's used to be. Why, bless me, it is the lad's appetite that made the old dishes at home taste so much better than those he has worked to pay for as a man. You remember that, Gladys, if ever you get married."

"If ever!" repeated her daughter with fine scorn, "I like that! I have only to wind up Bernard Holt now and I've got him on toast," boasted the young lady in language more expressive than elegant.

"And a good husband he will make you, my dear, having a comfortable professional income and no bad habits. But don't forget that marrying is something more than a bit of fun, Gladys. It is the work as well as the happiness of a lifetime—and unless it is the former I reckon it will fail to be the latter, for one at least of the parties concerned."

"What time will Merton be here, mother?"

"About three o'clock. I will stay in to receive him with a bit of dinner put by. And you go for the drive with papa and the Greys."

"I don't much care for those long drives," said Gladys doubtfully.

"Oh! but, my dear! you must. Papa has hired a landau and pair, and he would be so put about if you didn't enjoy yourself."

"How can I enjoy sitting still for two hours, listening to Mr. Grey and papa and Georgina wrangling about free trade and horrid dull things like that?" And Gladys spoke impatiently.

"I know, love. It is a bit dull. But papa can't understand that young people do not enjoy the same things that he does; and it vexes him if they don't seem to. So we must dissemble just a little, my dear, for the sake of peace. And mother will plan a nice treat for you next Saturday, when Bernard Holt will be here, to make up, if you will take care that papa is pleased to-day."

While Merton was travelling down through the flat eastern counties to Upperstrand he kept picturing his meeting with Ursula. He thought that under her influence he would forget the sharp lessons of the last few months, and feel the old buoyancy of spirit that he used to enjoy showing off, and made him feel so proud of himself and all his wonderful achievements. He was very homesick for that nice, young feeling now. But his journey would not have been so pleasant a one if he had foreseen what was about to happen at either end of it. He would never have started on it if he had known that his sister Gertrude and her husband intended utilising

their first afternoon in London in calling on Violet Mandeville, and giving her what Mrs. Cox was wont to describe as "a piece of my mind."

"Her behaviour to Merton is really disgraceful," exclaimed Gertrude Cox, flushed with the joys of the table d'hôte luncheon at the Grand Hotel, and strengthened thereby to abnormal bravery. "And I shall take good care to let her know what I think of her. Can I have twice of joint without paying extra, Albert?"

Her husband chuckled. He always considered Gertrude's indignation as a superb joke.

"Oh, my!" he observed meaningly. "I wouldn't be in that girl's shoes for ninepence this afternoon. You will give it her hot, no doubt."

"Trust me," replied Gertrude firmly. And Albert did. "She shall know what people think of her, and feel ashamed of playing fast and loose in such a heartless manner."

"What a spirit you have!" and Albert regarded her admiringly. "I should funk the job myself."

"Funk it!" repeated his wife scornfully, "and what is there to be afraid of, I should like to know? I am surprised at you, Albert!"

Gertrude's courage waxed even stronger as they drove in a hansom to Grosvenor Square.

"Don't expect me to do any of the talking," said her husband as the cab drew up. "Merton is your brother, not mine."

"I know that," she replied sharply. "But I don't want any one's help, thank you. I am quite competent to deal with this young woman without any one's assistance."

"I believe you are, my dear," added Albert with a wink.

Miss Mandeville was at home, the butler told them. In the flurry of the moment Gertrude had forgotten that Violet had an elder sister. Albert was wondering why it took a butler and two footmen to answer the front door bell—it seemed to him a waste of labour.

"It is very solemn," he remarked to Gertrude, when they were left alone in the big drawing-room, "but ain't it all scrumptuous?"

The scent of lilies and tuberoses pervaded the atmosphere which was warmed by the prettiest fire imaginable. Fires, like most other things, have their own individuality, and we know the sulky as well as the smiling one, the friendly fire as well as the fierce. This one in the Mandevilles' drawing-room touched with its glow the

thick, green carpet till it looked like a lawn in the sunshine, and enriched the many coloured knickknacks and cushions which were crowded everywhere in artistic carelessness. It smiled on the profusion of cut flowers and tall, stately plants as if to make up to them for the loss of the outside light, which a grimy fog was stealing too early even for an autumn afternoon. And it shed a suggestion of comfort as well as beauty throughout the whole room. Albert peered about on tiptoe, though his footsteps would in any case have been muffled by the thick velvet pile, and Gertrude forgot her mission in gazing at the innumerable photographs, many of which were signed with most distinguished names.

"Mr. and Mrs. Albert Cox," repeated Victoria with a puzzled expression when the summons reached her. "I never heard of such people."

"Constituents," suggested Lady Clementina, in whose boudoir they were sitting. "Do go and cope with them. I am too busy. Say that I am ill, or out, or resting."

"But they asked for me, apparently."

"Do you remember the last constituents who called," continued her mother with a little shriek of laughter, "how awful it was! Your father sent up for me, and that idiot Charles came down

again and announced, 'Her ladyship says she is asleep.'"

"It is too early for tea," said Victoria doubtfully, moving her coffee cup off the table.

"Not for constituents," replied her mother decidedly, "and if they refuse tea offer them luncheon instead! Country people go to see so many sights that their meals get all mixed up, so they are sure to be hungry—and thirsty if they are men."

"It is a man and a woman. What a bore! There won't be time now to finish those invitations before the carriage comes round." But when Victoria entered the drawing-room there was no trace of boredom on her pleasant face. The swish of her silk skirt as she ran downstairs filled Gertrude's warlike spirit with a faint misgiving, and at Miss Mandeville's friendly greeting Mrs. Cox's usually voluble tongue clave to the roof of her mouth.

"I am so glad to see you," said Victoria with a smile of welcome. "It was very nice of you to find time to come and see us when I dare say every hour is filled up."

"We aren't staying in London long," gasped Gertrude, not knowing what else to say.

"Then it is all the nicer of you," laughed

Victoria. "But short visits in town always accomplish more than long ones. We poor folk who live here, don't see half as much as if we ran up for a week twice a year. What do you think of the new piece at the Criterion?" turning towards Albert, who was twirling his new kid gloves into a little roll of damp skin.

"Haven't seen it yet," he muttered.

"We might go to-night," suggested Gertrude. "We ought to go somewhere for a jaunt, oughtn't we?" and she appealed to Victoria.

"I am quite afraid you wouldn't get seats at such short notice, though I remember we once did, on the morning of the day. The man at Mitchell's met me with the cheering announcement: 'Fortunately there has been a death, so I can let you have two stalls in the third row.'" And Victoria laughed lightly.

"I have rather a fancy for seeing the Albert Hall myself, and there was something advertised there this evening at seven—I read it in the papers—but I forget whether it was a concert or a meeting."

"How about the seats there?" asked her husband. "Should we be likely to get in?"

Victoria pictured the rows of empty stalls and the fly-like appearance of a scanty audience in

black bonnets, which seven o'clock entertainments are apt to gather; and then a brilliant idea struck her.

"There may be a general election this winter," she thought to herself, but aloud she said:

"Won't you have our box to-night? We shall be so pleased if you care to make use of it, and that will save you the bother of going after tickets."

"And the price of them, too!" exclaimed Albert, with a greedy look in his pale eyes.

"Do take it," repeated Victoria, as if she were pleading for a favour to be conferred. "Here, I will write the number for you on a piece of paper," and she went to the writing table. "I do hope you will have a pleasant evening," she added, pressing the envelope into Gertrude's hand. "And now I must ring for tea."

"I hardly think we ought to stay—" began Albert, but Gertrude silenced him with a warning frown.

"Men always jib at the thought of tea," laughed Victoria, "but we women couldn't live without it, could we?" and she laid her hand in a fascinating friendly way on Gertrude's arm.

"I always fancy my tea," began Mrs. Cox, and then the remembrance of her denunciatory mis-

sion flashed across her mind; and she drew a deep breath and cleared her throat. "I believe," she said hesitatingly, and then the entrance of the tea cut short her remark. Albert was watching with deep interest the butler and the peculiarly lordly way which butlers have of presiding over the arrangement of a meal without lifting a finger in its preparation. And he came to the conclusion as he saw the not over-onerous duty of bringing in tea divided between two stately footmen, that the butler's work was hardly equal to his wages—a conclusion to which others have also come, before and since. But the whole scene was extremely impressive to both Gertrude and her husband, and the former felt quite faint at the thought of what she once meant to say; still she was a brave woman, and so made one more gasping attempt while Victoria's attention was concentrated on the dispensing of the tea and sandwiches.

"Fine cows they must keep up here," observed Albert with a laugh, as Victoria tried to tilt into his cup a suitable measure of the thick heavy substance which goes by the name of cream in London.

"Isn't it horrid stuff?" exclaimed Miss Mandeville confidingly. "I often wonder what it is

made of—though that is foolish of me. It is always a mistake to know what anything is made of, and usually misleading too; because things do not a bit consist of their materials."

"I don't follow you," said Albert, while Gertrude was nerving herself for a final plunge.

"Well, you see," explained Victoria kindly, "there need be no difference between the materials of a Paris gown and a home-made one—" but then Gertrude interposed.

"Weren't you recently engaged?" she asked bluntly; and then she choked so violently from nervousness, or, as she was careful to explain afterwards through her paroxysms, from "a crumb gone the wrong way," that it took Victoria's undivided attention to restore her, and to replace the spilled tea and saucerful of soaked cake.

"I expect it is my sister Violet you are thinking of," she replied after these few busy moments, during which she had been wondering what the constituency had heard. And with ready instinct she resolved to disarm possible disapproval by a flattering intimacy. "That was a very trifling affair. Very unsuitable, you know, and we should have dragged her out of it before, only we knew she would soon get tired of him on her own account. But now we have a much

more interesting piece of news! I think I might tell you," and she slightly emphasised the *you*, "because you are all so nice and interested in our affairs. Violet is engaged now—only just, so this is a special mark of confidence," and she took Gertrude's hand with a pretty little touch of friendliness, "to Captain Evelix—a man who has been wounded in the war and has been given the Victoria Cross. We are all so delighted."

"Oh!" gasped Gertrude.

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" exclaimed Albert.

Victoria looked surprised. "Oh, no! she has known him for nearly three months. This is his photograph," and the Coxes found themselves gazing in silence at the picture of a handsome young giant in a Highland uniform.

"He is rather a dear, isn't he?" and Victoria smiled. "And we shall bring him down into the division next election and show off our new toy. But you mustn't tell about the engagement until it appears in the *Morning Post*, will you? Or they might scold me for letting out secrets. Only, I don't know how it is," continued Miss Mandeville with a whimsical look, "but one makes friends with some people so quickly." And both Albert and Gertrude felt that they were remarkably blessed in possessing such innate

attractions as to instantly claim the friendship of the whole British aristocracy.

"Must you be going?" exclaimed Victoria as her visitors at last stood up, while a little pæan of silent thankfulness rose from her heart. "It has been so good of you to come and see us! Have you any message for my father? He will be so pleased to hear you have called."

"Oh my!" ejaculated Albert, when they stood once more on the muddy pavement outside.

"I wonder Merton had the cheek!" said Gertrude with a deep-drawn breath. "It was like his impudence."

"She's affable," said Albert slowly, "awful affable! but she's stately too. Not the sort for the likes of us to marry."

"I should think not! Did you notice her dress? It must have cost a pretty penny. And there was a lovely silk petticoat all ruched underneath. I saw it when she sat on that chair beside the fireplace and put her foot on the fender. Silk stockings, too. The ten-and-sixpenny kind."

"How Merton could have dreamed of marrying one of that lot beats me," and Albert shook his head.

"I'd as soon have married the Czar of Russia

or the Pope of Rome," said his wife emphatically, "and Merton's a bigger fool than I gave him credit for," she added with sisterly candour.

It was a glorious afternoon of sunshine on the east coast. The unclouded sky and still atmosphere defied all suggestion of winter's chill. The gardens still looked gay with bright, late flowers, and the woods and bracken glowed with the golden beauty of autumn's touch. It seemed as if that three hours' run from London had taken Merton into a different zone, so summer-like the soft air felt after the damp, cold fog of town. He did not want any lunch, to his mother's great regret, for in her opinion hot meat and vegetables were a panacea for many ills—neither would he talk at all except about the weather, and Mrs. Wainwright wisely kept all the local family news for a more propitious occasion.

"I think I'll go out," he said shortly, as he selected a cigar from his case and carefully lit it.

"Do, my boy. It is beautiful walking along the cliffs, and I will come and meet you later on. Most of the party have gone for a drive—except Ursula," she added as an afterthought, "and she is out somewhere. The fresh air will do you

good, my dear," for her motherly sight noticed that Merton's face was thinner and paler than it used to be, and there was a tired, restless look about his eyes.

Merton half smiled. "It was so tactful of Ursula," he thought, "to wait out of doors for him. Their meeting would be so much more romantic alone with the sea and country, than in the presence of roast beef and the lodging-house waiting maid. It was just like Ursula to understand. He almost believed that she would guess what he had come back to say to her"—for when our thoughts travel quickly towards any given goal it is difficult to realise that we make the journey alone, and that our company is only an imaginary one. As a matter of fact Ursula had forgotten what time Merton was expected, and had gone out alone for the joy of re-living some of the dear walks and talks she had been having lately with David. But when she saw the smart, well-dressed figure, which alone spoiled the beauty of nature's landscape, coming towards her across the coast-bound fields, she hurried to meet him with an old touch of pleasure; and because she was so happy herself, she felt a sudden longing that Merton, together with the rest of mankind, should be happy, too.

"I am so glad to see you," she exclaimed, holding out her hand, and looking up into his face with the unself-conscious gladness of simple friendliness. But Merton's tongue was tied, and for once in all their numerous talks Ursula had to take the lead. She told him about Upperstrand and the country round; she called his attention to the beauty of the coast line with its crumbling cliffs, and the wide stretch of shore streaked with the ruddy colouring of the washed-up seaweed, and the grass green of the slippery rocks. She talked about her father and Georgina and Winstow—of Mrs. Wainwright's kindness to her since her illness, and of the happy health-giving visit she was having by the sea. But of David she said nothing; for she knew that Merton's spirit was sore, and she shrank from hurting it with even the sight of another's joy.

"How well you look!" he said at last, "not as if you had been ill at all." For the touch of happiness quickly writes its message on the human face, and brings it a fresh measure of youth and beauty.

"I am quite well. Stronger than I have ever been before," and the pink colour rushed into her cheeks. "People often are after a real illness, you know."

"I am so glad," and Merton spoke solemnly, "because—because—I want you, Ursula."

"I do not understand," she exclaimed with a quick, puzzled look. "What is it you want me to do for you, Merton?"

"To tell me that you love me—" he began, but Ursula stood still with a little cry.

"Stop, stop! You must not say that to me now. Haven't you heard, Merton, about David and me?"

"David and you!" he repeated sharply, "what do you mean?"

"We love each other," she answered simply, but there was a ring of proud gladness in her voice.

"What!" cried Merton and there was an ugly glitter of anger in his eyes, "that man, twice your age and more, has dared to make you love him! It is monstrous! wicked! You cannot marry him, Ursula. You shall not."

A flush of indignation rushed over her face and impatient words rose to her lips; for Merton had no right to say such things to her. A scorn of his poor, selfish idea of love swept over her, for had he not said a minute before that he was glad she was better—not for her own sake but because he wanted her? And then that he

should dare to criticise such a man as David and his deep, welling torrent of love. But as the thought of David filled the girl's heart all angry feelings fled away. "As sweet as summer" he had called her only yesterday, and so for David's sake no cross word must pass her lips—no touch of temper cloud the sweetness which he loved.

"Merton," she said with a sudden gentleness born of this remembrance of David, "I want us always to be friends, so you must not say things like that again to me. Perhaps you don't quite understand about it yet."

"I understand enough to know that girls are all alike," he interrupted with the injustice of fury. "Ready enough to fail a fellow when he needs them most."

"But, Merton, you forget. Sometimes the girl has need, too. And she does not often fail the man who comes to her in answer to it. I have been taking care of other people all my life—but David is the first person who ever thought it worth while to take care of me."

"Confound him!" muttered Merton, as he slashed at the jagged stubble of the empty corn-fields with his walking stick.

"—And—and it is the most heavenly feeling

in the whole world," added Ursula with so rapt a face that even Merton's anger was stayed, "for I have been so ill and tried. But I love it all now—all the hardships and the suffering and the hurt—because they brought me David."

"And what is to become of me?" Merton asked in an aggrieved tone.

"Some day I trust you will meet a woman who is strong enough to give you all the help and care, and the kind of love you want," and Ursula's face was full of pity, "but if I were you, Merton, I would not look out for her. We make such stupid mistakes when we try to plan out our lives for ourselves."

"I thought you would have been glad to see me, Ursula—in that way, I mean," and the old boyish selfishness rang in his pleading voice. "Why have you changed?"

"Because I have looked Death and Love in the face, since last we met; and I know now how utterly ignorant I was of both before."

"I loved you—" he began, but she stopped the words almost before they fell.

"Hush! hush! You make a mistake. You thought perhaps, you loved me—but, Merton, don't be vexed with me for saying so—you really only loved yourself."

"How do you know that?" asked the young man sharply.

"Because," replied Ursula slowly, "because of the immeasurable difference between it and David's love for me."

Then they saw Mrs. Wainwright hurrying towards them, and Merton realised that the Ursula who might once have cared for him was gone, and the girl beside him now no longer within his reach. A new Ursula, younger with the dainty freshness of renewed health, wiser and deeper through the waters of experience which had recently flooded her life. He knew that he had lost his power over her, and the knowledge hurt him; for Merton's was one of those natures who hate to give up what they are too careless to keep, and in his heart he blamed everybody he could think of for what he alone had done. And Ursula, walking in silence beside him, wondered how ever she could have thought that Merton and she were in love with each other; and a prayer of thankfulness rose from her soul that God had taken so much better care of her than she would have done of herself. A prayer, which many of us will hasten to offer to Him when the fuller light of the Beyond first dawns upon our opened eyes, and

we see the perfect whole instead of its misleading fraction.

"Tea is ready, my dears," exclaimed Mrs. Wainwright, panting with the exertion of her hurried walk, "and I brought a few shrimps for a relish seeing that it is Merton's first day at the seaside."

"I hate shrimps," he interrupted irritably—but it was life that Merton hated so bitterly just then. His mother's kind face fell, for when the table failed to soothe mankind her resources were crippled indeed.

"I don't," said Ursula quickly. "I think they are delicious, and I am so hungry!" she added with a smile.

"That's right, my love. And Merton will feel different when he once sits down to them," and she looked a little wistfully at the handsome, clouded face.

"I shall never feel different," he answered moodily, and turned his eyes out seawards to hide the little mist which had gathered in them and for a moment clouded his clear sight. And then, as Ursula hung behind to gather some of the graceful grasses and pale, belated poppies that fringed the edge of the cliff, Mrs. Wainwright laid her hand on Merton's arm.

"It is a sad day for us mothers when we can't

comfort the children any longer," she said softly; "but I understand all about it, my boy, and there never can come a day when I shall not feel with and for you, dear. May God give you the help I can only pray for, now you are too grand and grown-up for mother to make things all right again for you herself, as she could when you were a lad."

And Merton remembered with a pang that he would willingly have thrown away this love also for the sake of social success, just as he had thrown away Ursula's. It was not his doing that he had not, but because a true mother's love is too tender and tenacious a thing to be torn off and thrust away by even the roughest or most careless hands.

A few days after Merton's visit Ursula was walking again along her favourite cliff path which runs for miles round that part of the east coast—climbing some of the hedges and forcing its way through others. At some points it comes perilously near the broken edge, and then winds for a while along the fields a little inland, enticing the wayfarers on and on with promises of prettier places and wider views, until distance is forgotten in delight. And this time David was with her.

"I missed you so," she was telling him, "for there is nobody to take care of me when you are away, and I can't get on at all now by myself. You have spoiled me," and she clung with a childish gesture to his arm.

"I can't help it, little one."

"I don't want you to help it. It makes the world all full of warmth and sunshine and flowers."

"You have been so many years in school, dear love. I long to give you a holiday now."

"You do, you do! Every day I spend with you is a holiday. And I feel so strangely young and light-hearted, as if the days were not big enough to hold so much happiness."

He crushed her little hand still closer in his great, strong grasp, but could not speak of the deep joy which welled up within him at her words.

"I don't believe that any one who has not been ill could quite understand the wonderful freshness of being better. I feel like a little child again, only much brighter and merrier than I ever was in those days."

"You were such a sad, grave little girl."

"I think," said Ursula, thoughtfully, "that an illness either makes a person very young or very old. It never leaves you as it found you."

"It has made you a thousand times more dear."

"Do you really mean it? It would be so dreadful to pass through such an experience and come out of it no richer in wisdom and gentleness and sweetness as well as in the feelings of renewed health and youth. Oh, David!" and her voice thrilled with earnestness, "I do so want to be good! You'll help me, won't you?"

"We will help each other, my darling."

"I want to be good for two reasons. Because I belong to you and because I belong to God."

"Yet that is only one reason, after all, sweetheart. For love's dear sake. And there is no stronger one on this side death, or the other," he added gently.

For a moment they walked in the silence of a great peace, and then the glad gleam of youngheartedness lit up again the grave depths of Ursula's eyes.

"Georgina gave me some good advice on Sunday evening," she told him with a little smile; "I was very tired and homesick for you, and my head ached, and when I said something about not being very strong yet she told me I ought to thank God every hour that the fever had only left some weakness behind and not a lifelong

delicacy or disease. I wondered how many times a day she thanked God for not having had a fever at all!"

"And how did you answer her, dear child?"

"I shocked her by saying that I know God too well to offer up to Him any such stupid, gloomy little thanksgivings. Of course really my whole heart is full of gratitude and joy, but for something better than only a negative blessing. Oh, look, David!" she suddenly exclaimed as they turned towards the west. For the sun, hidden all day by a soft veil of blue-grey cloud, as it gradually sank towards the horizon line, cleared for its royal way a pathway of gold stretching right round one part of the landscape and far away over the northern sea. And as they watched the band of light broaden and brighten as the sun himself drew near, the shining rays suddenly escaped and swept over the whole scene as the smile on a well-loved face.

The whole world of woods and fields, of sea and sand caught the burnish of that wondrous yellow light, and claimed in a thousand different ways its beauty for their own. The clouds melted by the magic of that gleaming miracle, and the saffron streak which lay beneath them deepened into orange as it spread upwards to

meet the blue and purple and rose colour of the opal sky.

"There is this to thank Him for," said Ursula, exultingly, her face fanned by the pure seaborn wind, and her hands stretched out as if to grasp some tangible treasure of that infinite wealth of glory; "all the beauty of nature as well as of life. For you, David, and our love for each other, and for the splendid, young, spring feeling in my limbs as well as my heart. But most of all," she added softly, as the great ball of fire fell behind the distant hills, leaving a crimson afterglow in its train, "for the message He sends us by Joy or Pain of how exquisitely near to each other Heaven and Earth really are."

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